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Power Politics in the Xiongnu Empire

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Power Politics in the Xiongnu Empire

Abstract

This thesis employs an integrated approach of the historical and archaeological evidence relevant to the study of the Xiongnu empire (3rd century BC – 1st century AD) in an attempt to construct new contexts of understanding the political strategies for securing and ensuring power, legitimacy, and authority in the steppes. I have relied upon the full corpus of Chinese records which address the Xiongnu entity, synthesized the entirety of excavated materials in China, South Siberia, and Mongolia which relate to the Xiongnu phenomenon, and incorporated new survey and excavation data from two regions of the Xiongnu empire. Through the course of the dissertation, I utilize a paradigm of imperial strategies, rather than typologies of imperial polities, in order to provide a less restrictive manner of reconstructing the power politics of the steppe empire. A diachronic consideration of the combined textual narratives and archaeological materials exhibits two distinct periods of the Xiongnu polity. This dissertation focuses on the shifts between these two periods and the resulting new traditions that sought to distinguish and elevate restricted ranks of the imperial élite and assert a cosmopolitan culture of steppe empire that together would ensure authority and control both within the empire and toward its neighbors.

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Bryan Kristopher Miller

A DISSERTATION

in

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Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

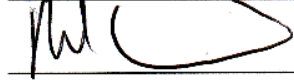
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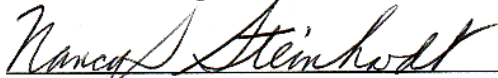
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Bryan Kristopher Miller

For the Three Ring Circus

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The dissertation is but a single portion of the training and activities and mentorship that go into the achievement of a doctoral degree. And as this tome is the heaviest physical manifestation of that accomplishment, I must try my best to remember to give thanks to all who gave wise words and helping hands. Words of course can never fully suffice for the gratitude I owe a multitude of people. The paragraphs, pictures, and pages of this dissertation already present a sufficiently voluminous read, so I will try to remain brief in my acknowledgements.

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ABSTRACT

POWER POLITICS IN THE XIONGNU EMPIRE

Bryan K. Miller

Supervisor: Paul R. Goldin

This thesis employs an integrated approach of the historical and archaeological evidence relevant to the study of the Xiongnu empire (3rd century BC – 1st century AD) in an attempt to construct new contexts of understanding the political strategies for securing and ensuring power, legitimacy, and authority in the steppes. I have relied upon the full corpus of Chinese records which address the Xiongnu entity, synthesized the entirety of excavated materials in China, South Siberia, and Mongolia which relate to the Xiongnu phenomenon, and incorporated new survey and excavation data from two regions of the Xiongnu empire. Through the course of the dissertation, I utilize a paradigm of imperial strategies, rather than typologies of imperial polities, in order to provide a less restrictive manner of reconstructing the power politics of the steppe empire. A diachronic consideration of the combined textual narratives and archaeological materials exhibits two distinct periods of the Xiongnu polity. This dissertation focuses on the shifts between these two periods and the resulting new traditions that sought to distinguish and elevate restricted ranks of the imperial élite and assert a cosmopolitan culture of steppe empire that together would ensure authority and control both within the empire and toward its neighbors.

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Chapter One:

INTRODUCTION

The interior history of the steppe is that of Turko-Mongol hordes jostling one another for the best grazing grounds, and of their endless migrations from pasture to pasture, driven mainly by the needs of their herds. ...Of these unceasing wanderings between the Yellow River and Budapest, history, written by men of sedentary nations, has retained but little, and then only such events as affected themselves. They noted the onslaught of the waves that broke at the foot of the Great Wall or of their Danubian fortresses, Tatum or Silistra. But what do they tell of the inner turbulence of the Turko-Mongol peoples?

(Grousset, *Empire of the Steppes* 1970 [1939]: xxiv)

Attempts to comprehend the grand political phenomena of steppe societies have long been guided by the historical writings left behind by those living outside the steppes. Historians have combed through the accounts for information that might elucidate the structure of the so-called steppe empires, but endeavors to reconstruct the interiors are continually dominated by the relationship of the steppes to the outside world, which so often narrated their history. Archaeological discoveries within Inner Asia over the past hundred years have added to the corpus of potential resources for understanding the steppe entities. However, this growing body of data, rather than providing critiques of or additional understandings to the previous models, has been fitted into the historical reconstructions in a manner that corroborates the existing theories and fills in the details. In this dissertation, I combine both historical and archaeological evidence of the first steppe empire, known as the Xiongnu 匈奴 (3rd century BC – 1st century AD), in an investigative dialogue to formulate dynamic theories of the shifting strategies of power politics in the steppe empire.

Theories of political entities in the steppes have developed alongside state agendas and intellectual trends from the time of ancient historical writings through to

present historical investigations. These have naturally come under scrutiny in the course of scholarly investigation, and the conjectures of economy and society stemming from the dichotomy of “the steppe and the sown” (Peake and Fleure 1928), which have so often accompanied conceptualizations of steppe politics, have equally met with criticism. While economic characterizations of the steppes such as Grousset’s (1939) have invited much criticism of their sweeping generalization illustrating “endless migrations from pasture to pasture, driven mainly by the needs of their herds,” notions of political traditions are equally deserving of reconsideration. Through an examination of the Xiongnu phenomenon, I confront the methodological problems of investigation presented by the comment that “history, written by men of sedentary nations, has retained but little” of the actions and practices of the steppe groups, address the agents and arenas of power politics, and move beyond discussions of frontier interactions between “the steppe and the sown” so that we might begin to “tell of the inner turbulence” of steppe societies and the polities they formed.

For inquiries into the power politics of the ruling portions of the steppe polity, I have emphasized, though not limited my research to, (a) records of the actions of, and interactions with, agents of the Xiongnu empire; (b) intellectual discourses and debates about the nature of the Xiongnu political organs and strategies; (c) mortuary monuments and ritual arenas of the upper echelons; and (d) accoutrements of power, their contexts, and the prestige goods systems apparent in their distribution and consumption. The available written evidence for the Xiongnu polity presents obstacles insofar as the entire corpus, unlike later steppe empires, was composed by outsiders from the Chinese realm. However, as long as one is cognizant of the agendas of the writings and the

predispositions of the writers, the prejudices in the texts do not pose impassible obstacles. The constraints of the archaeological record stem from sampling biases, poor preservation, and a paucity of proper reporting. In order to reconcile the constraints of archaeological discoveries from the steppes, I have chosen to focus on a handful of coherent sets of adequately reported data from the trough of muddled, though still useful, material and augment this with fieldwork which I conducted within the last eight years.

In order to dissect a polity, one must first understand the networks and practices which held the polity together and thus the agents of those institutions. Additionally, though many studies have criticized the bias of ancient accounts toward the more élite strata and lauded the efforts of investigations into the other portions and aspects of society¹, the historical and archaeological resources presently available for the study of the Xiongnu phenomenon are dominated by data that address the upper echelons. While the full extent of the political networks into the lower levels of society constitute an important part of understanding a polity, I have chosen a research question to which the maximum amount of information may contribute. I therefore present an analysis of the portions of steppe society which played a direct part in the rule and management of the Xiongnu polity by investigating the means and manifestations of power, legitimacy, and authority. Through this endeavor, I provide a dynamic depiction of particular practices that continually shaped and re-shaped the expansive Xiongnu steppe empire. Because of the multiplicity of sources of evidence, disciplinary traditions, and theoretical models

¹ Data for such investigations is presently being recovered (see Houle 2009; Miller et al. 2009; Torbat et al. 2008 Williams 2008; and Wright et al. 2009), though these efforts and their results are in the minority of the corpus of studies and represent only recent trends in archaeological investigations of the Xiongnu period. Continued excavations and surveys, and the publications of their results, will allow for a large scale comparative investigation of other facets related to society and economy of the Xiongnu period.

which are employed in this broad study, I will provide now a road map of sorts to explain the agendas of my research and the course of my analyses to carry them out.

Interdisciplinary Investigations

The period of the Xiongnu empire stands at rare crossroads of information for the study of steppe polities. It presents the first documented steppe empire through a large body of written material and also retains one of the largest corpuses of excavated archaeological material of any of the polities of eastern Inner Asia, matched only by the material of the Mongol Empire.² This provides an exceptional case for the study of Inner Asian polities as well as for the examination of the relationship between distinct sources of evidence, namely the historical and archaeological records. The sources of data which provide evidence for analysis and reconstructions of past peoples and societies vary broadly from dynastic histories and management records to constructed monuments and discarded material. In this dissertation, I have considered and reviewed fully all such available evidence, and presented here the portions of varied data sets, some more extensively than others, which pertain to the research questions presently asked.

Inquiries regarding the more high-status remains, which these archaeological data sets seemed still inadequate to address yet were critical to my investigation of power politics among the Xiongnu élite, I pursued through the archaeological fieldwork. I built up a foundation of understanding from four summers of excavation in central Mongolia

² Archaeological investigations of the 13th century Mongol Empire have concentrated on architectural sites, most especially the capital city of Khara Khorum (e.g. Roth et al. 2002), and stone statues which stand in the open steppes. In addition, the size and amount excavated of the graves of the Mongol period is significantly smaller than that of the Xiongnu period (Tseveendorj and Erdenebat 2007). Significant efforts continue to be placed in the investigations of the first empire (Xiongnu) and the world empire (Mongol), which both centered in the Mongolian steppes.

at an élite necropolis (Gol Mod 2: 2001-2003 and 2005) and accordingly formed an agenda of research questions for field surveys and excavations over the course of three subsequent summers at an élite cemetery and the surrounding sites and areas in far western Mongolia, at sites I perceived to represent a frontier of archaeological material related to the Xiongnu empire (Khovd province: 2006-2008). Brief reports of the information from these excavations and surveys have been recently published (Allard et al. 2002; Miller et al. 2006, 2008, 2009; Williams 2008), and I present in this study more introspective analyses of the resulting data. This fieldwork, which has focused on the complete contextualization of the most monumental of the élite Xiongnu tombs, has produced full surveys of necropolises and the mortuary complexes within, identifications of new features, test excavations of the different mortuary and ritual features, and, in the case of excavations in the Mongolian Altai, unusually well-preserved remains that have allowed for the explication of spoiled or scantily reported archaeological materials elsewhere.

The rich material record and volumes of written documents form the basis of a historical archaeological analytical dialogue used to address a common research inquiry (Laurence 2004) of the dynamic institutions of authority that maintained the Xiongnu polity. In chapter two, I review the ways in which scholars have framed the field of historical archaeology and utilize several case studies to illustrate approaches to the integrated use of text and material. I begin with a critique of the field, its origins and configurations in both Europe and North America, before addressing the inherent problematic assumptions which must be navigated in order to attempt an integrated material-textual study of a non-text-producing society.

Several concerns arise in the consideration of historical archaeology. First, should we consider it a discrete field, bound by a particular chronological division or level of social complexity, or can it be broadly defined as an approach, delineated by the use of multiple sources of evidence, namely historical and archaeological records. This leads us to the second question of whether writing and artifacts constitute independent fields of data, or are they necessarily restricted to their traditional disciplinary spheres that accord object examination to archaeology and text reading to history (Isayev 2006). Furthermore, are time scales of analysis necessarily divided according to disciplines or classes of evidence? Above all, I maintain that historical archaeology is indeed a technique, not limited by chronological scales of analysis or classes of society, which strives to surpass multi-disciplinary coupling of conclusions from separate engagements of research and work toward inter-disciplinary investigations that join different lines of evidence within a single inquiry (Isayev 2006; Laurence 2004; Patterson 2000).

The example of the Xiongnu challenges several divisive dichotomies imbedded in most historical archaeological paradigms. The division of prehistoric versus historic societies is called into question by a non-text-producing society, which would normally be placed within the rubric of prehistoric, co-existing with a text-producing society well within the confines of historic period studies. The hindrance that accompanies this division is a further dichotomy of power and complexity – the tribe and the state, the barbaric and the civilized. By the standard concepts of non-text-producing versus text-producing societies, one might assume that the former would be less powerful than the latter. While written narratives of the Chinese more often than not painted such a division between their civilized selves and the barbarian other (Pines 2005), the events of history

prove that the relationship between the Xiongnu and the Chinese was not always, nor inherently, one that seated the Chinese empire in a position of greater power. My investigation of the Xiongnu demonstrates the need for paradigms of historical archaeology which are less burdened by such dichotomies of sociopolitical divisions and structured more by accommodating methods of integrating a multiplicity of lines of evidence.

From the numerous other critiques and conjectures of historical archaeology, I have chosen to construct my analyses around the discursive approaches and concepts outlined by Andrén (1998) for the integrated study of texts and artifacts. *Contrastive and correlative correspondences* between these different sources of evidence together can construct new contexts of understanding past societies. In order to illustrate this approach, I have relied heavily upon the example of the Zhou 周 states of late Bronze Age pre-imperial China, most especially the state of Qin 秦 which eventually established the first Chinese empire (Falkenhausen 2004, 2006; Lewis 1999; Shelach and Pines 2006; Teng 2003). This example period provides important conceptual parallels with analyses done in later chapters of the dissertation on the particular shifts in mortuary customs of the developing Xiongnu polity. The Zhou states, as well as early medieval England (Härke 1990, 1997; Williams 2006), are used to clarify the means of establishing new contexts of understanding between texts and artifacts.

However, the historical archaeological study of late Bronze Age China is not one of a non-text-producing society. For this, I have brought to bear several other examples of how texts of an outside society may be compared and integrated with the material

evidence from within the society. The Scythians of Eastern Europe (Hartog 1988), the Wa people of proto-historic Japan (Farris 1998), and the Celts and Gauls of Western Europe (Arnold and Gibson 1995; Jones 1997; Nash 1976; Wells 2001) all constitute societies which did not produce their own writing, yet were in significant contact with, and documented by, neighboring text-producing societies. Despite the lack of their own accounts, these societies, through the careful consideration of textual and material evidence related to them, also constitute the objects of true historical archaeological research.

The numerous case studies also serve the purpose of demonstrating the varied manners in which the disciplines of history and anthropological archaeology delineate groups for the purpose of study. Both texts and artifacts are used to define ethnic identities, cultural affiliations, social standings, and political alliances, and the same evidence is often used to refer to multiple identities. Reconstructions of the past must come to terms with the ways which people delineated themselves in different spheres of interaction, resulting in the possession of multiple identities, the divisions which have been applied to them by outsiders looking in, and the categorizations which scholars studying them contrive. It is often the goal of researchers not only to delineate groups for analytical purposes but also to reconstruct emic divisions. In this dissertation, I aim to clarify as much as possible the divisions and forms of identity that were utilized in the legitimization, continuation and management of the Xiongnu polity.

In addition to the above examples of the Wa in Japan (Farris 1998) and the Celts, Germans and Scythians (Hartog 1988; Jones 1997; Mattingly 1992; Wells 2001), I refer to a number of “tribes” adjacent to the states of ancient Egypt and Bronze Age to early

medieval China. This last group of examples helps particularly to contextualize the label of Xiongnu within the tradition of naming northern foreign groups in the Chinese texts. The breadth and connotations of names within the accounts of outside societies, as well as the descriptions of the peoples to whom they were ascribed, depended to a great extent upon the agendas of the narrators.

The names in the texts have been equated with general ethnic labels, specific tribal names, and political designations, and often the origin of the name becomes lost as the label becomes conflated with the use of it in the narrative accounts. Furthermore, the historical names are often adhered to material cultural groups defined by archaeologists. This can pose a danger if the historical label drags with it numerous identities and distinctions which may not apply to the group in question. The application of these names to groups delineated in the archaeological record may be problematic, but the pitfalls can nevertheless be navigated. In the case of the Xiongnu, I argue that if we recognize the primarily political nature of this name as it is mentioned in the Chinese texts – in other words the designation of a political unit against which the Chinese struggled – then we may use it to describe talk about a political entity and its élite agents delineated within the archaeological record.

Before considering the notions of political entities in chapter three, I draw chapter two toward a close with an outline of the methods and models of delineating groups in the archaeological record, employing both quantitative and qualitative means of distinguishing them. Vertical distinctions tend to highlight social hierarchies, while horizontal distinctions emphasize any number of ethnic, cultural, or kin differences, and both such distinctions are employed by political agents and organs to maintain control

within and without the polity. It is important to review the methods through which scholars identify and construct such delineations, so that I can then concurrently discuss the strategies of power politics, the ways in which people were identified and organized in the course of political developments, and the manners in which such distinctions are manifested in the historical as well as archaeological records.

The writings of those outside the steppes provide us with a narrative picture of the foreign societies and polities as they saw them (Hartog 1988), but, as I will show in my analysis of the available texts, the category of historical writings, despite the agendas of the writers, may still yield information beneficial to the understandings of the interior politics of the foreign groups as well as exterior agents and events that directly affected or reflected the narrating society. I further argue that it is not so much inherent limits of the historical records that have hindered our understandings of the inner workings of steppe polities, but rather the discounting of intentionalities of the narratives and the frequent use of only a portion of the potentially pertinent resources for reconstructing past societies. I have therefore striven to recognize and thus navigate the issues of intentionality, preservation, and sampling of the resources of research, and to include equal considerations of unearthed material as well as the inherited texts.

Modern national borders have persisted in the division of relevant archaeological data into separate scholarly circles of investigation, and we must break down these barriers, admittedly difficult in their splintering linguistic differences, in order to incorporate all applicable material into analyses of the archaeological record. Similar linguistic barriers, as well as disciplinary biases, have obstructed the employment of the full body of texts. Limitations include the use of only those pieces that have been

translated from their original language, the predispositions ingrained in many such translations, and the frequent focus on only one of the many possible, and often conflicting, narratives. Thus an initial goal of the present study was to comprehensively collate the reports and studies of remains within all of the pertinent territories. I also sought to collate and, when necessary, translate all pertinent written sources, so as to supersede the practice of many studies that utilize only a selection of commonly employed passages from historical documents, rely on summaries of the original narratives, or depend on translations rather than original documents. Only through an equally exhaustive consideration of all resources, material and textual, can we reach a more ample understanding of the interior politics of the steppes.

As for the integration of narratives constructed within and by means of historical and archaeological lines of evidence, it is not my goal to determine which narrative is more correct. I have endeavored, through observances of contrasts and correlations, not to judge which rendition of the past is more valid but to work through integrated investigations toward the creation of new contexts of understanding that surpass the capabilities of any one narrative alone. Through subsequent chapters, I pursue an interdisciplinary study that considers the full corpuses of texts and materials in order to progress beyond many of the hindering assumptions in the analysis of steppe polities.

Research Paradigms

Since my study focuses on the Xiongnu polity, its formation and perpetuation, chapter three serves to outline theoretical models of political entities and to construct of a research paradigm for the examination of power and authority in large conquest polities

of the steppes. I do not seek to define types as much as delineate concepts from which to draw and around which to frame an understanding of each particular polity, in this case the Xiongnu. Goldstone and Haldon (2009: 4) advocate definitions of political entities that are more analytical than merely descriptive. A more dynamic depiction of polities – one which does not address the question of what they *are* so much as how they *behaved* (Smith 2003) – provides avenues of investigation less restricted to the determination of static categories. Many of the questions I ask of the evidence are based on categories of inquiry and terminology employed in the classification of a single polity, though I aim to apply an overarching inquiry into any indications of change for any of the factors within the life of said polity. From the investigations of both the historical and archaeological records I examine evidence for (a) structure of the polity and social hierarchies that occupied the positions of political power; (b) strategies of the polity seen through particular practices or institutions; (c) extent of the polity, territorial or otherwise, and apparent degrees of presence in the peripheral portions of the realm; and (d) discernible chronologies of the polity, especially changes in any of the three above facets of the polity.

Branding tactics of polity classifications belie an active understanding of the networks and actors within the societies and the fundamental strategies of power politics that shaped and *re*-shaped the political entities. Large and long-lived polities did not simply rise, drive forward and then fall; they were actively negotiated, reaffirmed through networks of power and practices of authority, and often developed through institutional changes. I therefore chose to call attention to significant changes not only in the establishment of the Xiongnu polity but in the course of its existence. I am less concerned

with providing typological models of steppe polities, which run the danger of glossing over important developments in the polity, and more with developing an understanding of the manners in which a political body responds to stress after it is formed so as to maintain its authority.

Theoretical models of large polities are more often than not based on investigations of non-mobile agrarian civilizations. When these models are turned toward Inner Asian polities, they frequently marginalize the steppe entities by considering them the exception to an otherwise sound set of paradigmatic rules (Doyle 1986; Goldstone and Haldon 2009; Morrison 2001). Furthermore, categorizations of steppe polities as predatory entities of mounted warriors and wandering herders have cultivated assumptions and biases of societies outside the steppes and advanced the definition of these polities only in relation to, and as critically dependant upon, large neighboring settled states of the outside world (Barfield 2001; Chaliand 2004; Khazanov 1994).

In chapter three, I utilize the vocabulary and concepts developed by the studies of such “axial civilizations” (Goldstone and Haldon 2009) as Persia and the Mediterranean and draw on comparative studies of later steppe polities, including the Türk and Mongol empires, to develop a paradigm of research for large conquest polities that may be applied to the states of Inner Asia as well as the more traditional polities of the so-called cradles of civilization. While much of the vocabulary related to strategies of power and legitimacy can be used to address radically different configurations of large political entities, and polities founded in the steppes share many fundamental similarities, I do not mean to suggest that all steppe polities collectively constitute a single archetype of equivalent structures. Di Cosmo (1999b) has demonstrated that despite comparable

resource bases and geographic settings, as well as the continued use of certain traditions, the states of Inner Asia have employed drastically different institutions and political organs to establish and maintain rule over their vast territories and feed the state machine. Beginning in the outlines of chapter three and continuing through the dissertation, I address the spectrum of possible strategies and propose explanations for the choices and shifts in political tactics which are observed in the written and material records.

Considerations of Historical and Archaeological Resources

Large political entities referred to as empires span a great spectrum of territory and traditions, but one dichotomy that persists is that between polities which produced aggrandizing claims of extensive authority in preserved written evidence and those which only modern scholars, so far as we know, have declared as imperial states (Schreiber 2001). The line that has been drawn between the two seems to run parallel to the quintessential division between prehistoric and historic societies – between polities like the Inca and Wari of South America and those of Han China and Rome, the latter two of which produced copious amounts of written records related to imperial ideology. While the Xiongnu did not produce their own writings, we do have access to contemporary accounts from the Chinese which cite the leaders of the steppe polity as having declared such imperial aspirations of extensive and inclusive rulership: the supreme ruler of the Xiongnu tribes declared himself supreme ruler of all the territories north of China and redefined all the groups north of the Great Wall as “all are Xiongnu” (皆為匈奴) [*Shiji* 110: 2896].

Since this dissertation investigates a polity whose existence, participants, and grand claims of sovereignty are documented in written accounts, I begin the consideration of evidence with a review of the historical narratives. These are the sources of our knowledge of the numerous diplomatic and military endeavors to retain control of the regions and peoples over which the Xiongnu empire claimed authority. In the course of chapter four, the collective narratives of the written records are outlined and traced through a chronology – from the beginning of the steppe polity known as the Xiongnu, at the end of the third century BC, up to its final demise as hegemonic nucleus of the groups of eastern Inner Asia in the first century AD. In this review, I not only provide a chronology of events and elite agents of the polity but strive to identify phases seen through changes in the networks, agents, institutions, or practices that preoccupy the narratives of the steppe polity.

Among the available written materials, sections of the Chinese *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記) by Sima Qian 司馬遷 have held the most prominent place in studies of the Xiongnu historical phenomenon. The significance of the *Shiji* in the general field of Chinese history and the study of Chinese historical consciousness remains prominent (Durrant 1995; Hardy 1999) even in comparison with the preceding chronicles and treatises upon it was based (Schaberg 2001). This encyclopedic history of the Chinese world, as it was known at the time of completion in the late first century BC, is important for the present considerations of the Xiongnu since it included the first semblance of an ethnography and chronicle of foreign entities – an entire chapter dedicated to the northern peoples known collectively as the Xiongnu. This chapter

provides the first glimpse of the emergence of steppe power in relation to the Chinese and the establishment of the Xiongnu empire (Di Cosmo 2002).

Within a few decades of the completion of the *Shiji*, the discourse known as the *Debates on Salt and Iron* (*Yan tie lun* 鹽鐵論) was compiled in order to register debates at the Chinese court in 81 BC between Modernist ministers and Reformist literati and their subsequent discussions (Loewe 1974a, 1993). The deliberations stemmed from an assessment of the government monopolies on salt and iron, enacted primarily to fill the Chinese imperial coffers which had run dry from the wars with the Xiongnu. This naturally led to discussions of policies concerning the Xiongnu and thus scattered descriptions of the Xiongnu. Proposals by individual ministers to the Chinese emperors bear mention in the narratives of the dynastic histories, and some of them have been preserved in full as sections of collected works of these ministers. One such proposal by the minister Jia Yi 賈誼 – “Three Models and Five Baits” (*san biao wu er* 三表五餌) – given in the early years of the Han empire, or the beginning of the second century BC, is preserved in a *New Book* (*Xin shu* 新書) revised collection of his works compiled in the later first century BC. Despite the lag between the supposed memorial to the emperor and the version which is now available, the text of this proposal remains an important insight into Han-Xiongnu relations and, I will argue, the inner workings and customs of the Xiongnu steppe groups.

The major textual source from which I draw is the *Book of Han* (*Han shu* 漢書), the dynastic history of the Former Han regime covering the years 209 BC to 23 AD. This work is chiefly attributed to Ban Gu 班固, who compiled and composed chapters during

the Later Han regime (24-220) over the years 36-62 and 74-92, though was begun by his father Ban Biao 班彪 and completed with the help of his sister Ban Zhao 班昭. It was clearly modeled on the *Shiji*, though may have served as the basis for reconstructing a badly damaged *Shiji* in the version now extant (Hulsewé 1993: 130). The *Han shu* also contains a chapter on the Xiongnu, but it is lengthier, divided into two sub-chapters, and often contains more details in the sections which overlap with the chapter in the *Shiji*. Ban Gu had full access, as did Sima Qian, to the Chinese imperial library of edicts, letters, chronicles and memorials – a plethora of primary documents from the interactions with the Xiongnu steppe entity. He additionally was stationed in the Western Regions for a substantial amount of time and even accompanied the Chinese generals on a campaign of the late first century AD deep into Xiongnu territory. The variant portions of the *Han shu* related to the northern steppes, seen in the Xiongnu chapters as well as other sections, arguably provide more details of names, events, and practices than its Former Han counterpart, the *Shiji*. More importantly, the *Han shu* covers almost the entirety of the first centuries BC and AD, which, as it will become increasingly apparent in subsequent chapters, represent the core periods for historical archaeological discussions of shifts in power politics within the steppes.

It is not merely the result of having historical records with details of events and people and refined chronologies that draw our attention to this particular period. It will be shown that the chronologies of both the historical and archaeological sources demonstrate noteworthy changes during the first century BC, and I propose a model of dramatic shifts in political dynamics during this time that explains the overlapping periods of change.

Details of events or actors narrated in the historical records may at times provide evidence enough for inferring the reasons or instigations for such change, yet we should carefully compare, contrast, and attempt to reconcile the collected narratives and inferences therein with those evinced from material manifestations of political strategies and changes in political entities apparent in the archaeological record.

In chapter five, I provide a summary of approaches to the material means of identifying political entities, more specifically empires as this concept is described in chapter three, and the material evidence of power politics. The definition of boundaries, and the recognition of numerous kinds of boundaries, becomes important in the delineation of polities. Indirect clients who participate in a tributary system that links them to the imperial polity are difficult to discern, in the archaeological record, from peer polities and neighbors who interact with the central polity only in realms such as trade. For the discussion of archaeological material, I therefore outline the means by which we may identify groups which participated directly in the state networks of political power. I address the means of materialization of power politics (DeMarrias et al. 1996) through my assessment of the documented accoutrements and arenas, in which the polity and its members invested, and an understanding of the agents of action and participation inferred from the prestige goods, monuments and practices surrounding them. Together, these provide us with the ability to postulate the motivations and manners of change. The archaeological record seems to present more of the accoutrements and theaters, while the historical records more directly explicates the agents and practices, but considerations of power politics should not be limited along such a dichotomy.

In order to clarify these archaeological approaches, I return to several of the case studies mentioned in chapters two and three. The burial assemblages and furnishings of extravagant Celtic burials include numerous exotic goods from the Mediterranean and elsewhere (Arnold 1999; Wells 2001), and these provide an ideal comparative understanding for the occurrence of exotic goods and styles from China and elsewhere which begin to appear in the elite Xiongnu burials during the first century BC. The Zhou states of China exhibited dramatic changes in elite funerary customs (Falkenhausen 2006) that bear striking resemblance to the rifts in styles and scales of Xiongnu mortuary monuments and their burial assemblages that also developed in the first century BC. These prestige goods and theaters of power may relate to either the sources of power or formalizations of legitimacy which the ruling bodies of the steppe polities required for establishing authority (Smith 2003).

In chapter six, I present the variety of objects and monuments that may relate, either directly or indirectly, to the practices and agents of power politics in the Xiongnu empire. There are of course limitations of the available archaeological resources. Studies are presently hindered by two major factors: record of reporting and emphasis of excavations. The vast majority of the unearthed and documented material of the Iron Age for eastern Inner Asia consists of graves of relatively significant size or within more prominent burial grounds, and these have absorbed the interests of field archaeologists working in this general region. Of the pertinent sites in Mongolia and Russian South Siberia, fifty-five have excavated portions with no published report, twenty-seven sites have brief reports on their excavations, of which consist of a handful of features at large sites, and only three significantly excavated and fully reported sites exist. This places

significant restraints on the ability to do focused quantitative analyses, but the overall volume of information nevertheless provides sufficient data for the present study of steppe wide dynamics.

In the attempt to delineate the boundaries of the imperial élite and their realm, I have examined remains in regions that lie well outside the usual investigations of material culture attributed to the Xiongnu. Several reports and collected studies of sites in the area south of Lake Baikal (Konovalov 1976; Kradin et al. 2004), growing syntheses of archaeological material focused on sites within the borders of modern Mongolia (Dorjsuren 1961; Torbat 2004), and discourses on sites within the Northern Zone of China attributed to the Xiongnu phenomenon (Tian and Guo 1986; Wu'en 2008) all provide detailed regional considerations of their archaeological records, with recognition of material elsewhere, yet fall short of comprehensive considerations of the archaeological material across eastern Inner Asia. Chapter six presents a comprehensive integration of the full spectrum of material as well as investigate remains beyond the above three regions that have occupied the attention of scholars investigating the Xiongnu. This includes sites in northeast China, far northwest China, and the Yenesei River and Tuva regions of South Siberia, to the northwest of modern Mongolia. These are important additional regions of consideration for identifying and understanding material cultural frontiers of the imperial élite.

In order to determine the edges, we must investigate beyond what is traditionally considered the limits. This applies to the spatial as well as chronological spread of pertinent material. Just as the regions outside of the areas directly within the political network of the empire are important for understanding the dynamics at the frontier and

the interior effects of peer polity interaction, we must also familiarize ourselves with the chronological precedents of the materials and practices of the polity in question. For this reason, I have also presented in chapter six a brief overview of the remains of the late Bronze Age across the same span of territories as the Iron Age remains. This also helps us understand the origins of some of the enacted traditions as well as the facets in which the society in question has broken with practices and institutions of the past. The final contributions of chapter six are the delineation of material cultural trends within the steppes and the identification of two major chronological phases of the archaeological remains. Chronological divisions are the cornerstone of dynamic understandings of the past, and thus critical to the ability to plot changes in the institutions of political power.

In chapter seven, I address the accoutrements and arenas of power, and infer some of the associated agents and actions, for each of the two periods. The divisions of material delineated in the course of chapter six provide phases of traditions and help to outline the changes between them. Using the models for material manifestations of power politics, presented in chapter five, I address changes in the archaeological record apparent in (a) the overall increased investment in and standardization of funeral practices across a large area of territories, (b) the growing gaps in the hierarchy of graves with the addition of a new form of burial, (c) the continuation of previous customs of interment alongside changes in assemblages of prestige goods and styles of burial furnishings, and (d) the shift in the geographical spread of material cultural traditions that together may be attributed to the steppe polity. These changes are used to construe transformations in the strategies of power politics, and from the nature of those transformations I accordingly infer possible reasons for such developments.

Contributions

One of my primary goals in the course of this dissertation is to demonstrate the benefit of a truly integrated, and in this case historical archaeological, inquiry. In the concluding chapter, I contrast and compare the narratives I have fashioned and the deductions I have reached from the textual and material corpuses of evidence according to the agenda of inquiry into the Xiongnu empire and power politics in the steppes which I set out in the beginning: the structure, strategies, extent, and development of the polity. How do the sources address the issues of power, legitimacy, and authority? Do the narratives correlate in any way? Can we reconcile any apparent contradictions? Or, in what way do contrasts force us to reevaluate the narratives at hand, leading us to new understandings of the past and even of the narratives themselves?

The chronologies apparent from the historical and archaeological resources both exhibit two periods, centered around changes in the first century BC, which overlap to such a degree that they perhaps demonstrate two distinct phases of the polity. But while the two chronological divisions correlate, do the dynamics of power politics seen in the respective narratives exhibit a comparable relationship? Use of the historical sources alone runs the risk of glossing over drastic changes or misrepresenting periods for which we have few accounts, as is the case for a large portion of the second period. The relatively minimal amount of archaeological material for the first period might also be misleading, and reliance on archaeological materials alone runs the chance that the two periods could be characterized as representing two entities of radically different political structure, rather than the single polity, admittedly with an interim, that seems not to have

been restructured between the first and second periods as much as been refashioned and reconstituted. A dramatic shift in hierarchical distinctions and the sources and expressions of authority appear within the mortuary arena from the first to the second period, necessitating a reevaluation of the historical narratives.

While the Chinese accounts do not speak directly of any significant change in the structure of political ranks or institutions after the establishment of the Xiongnu empire, the extraordinary changes in the material record highlight the otherwise subtle differences mentioned in the texts between the two periods and call attention to the events that occurred during the interim period of political strife. Numerous anthropological models exist for the explanation of such changes in the archaeological record, though we are fortunate in this case to also have an extensive historical record which describes detailed events and actors that may assist in the explanation of changes. I argue that the seemingly contrasting narratives and developments evident in the historical and archaeological records are actually related and may be explained in a dynamic context of changes in strategies by the members of the uppermost echelons of the empire to more resiliently demonstrate power and secure more definitive control of their ranks and authority.

Chapter Two:

HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPROACHES

The steppe regions of Inner Asia have been the seat of numerous political entities of varying size and complexity, from smaller competing polities to vast imperialistic conquest polities. However, not all steppe groups in this region have been thoroughly documented in historical records – most are known through the accounts of outsiders – and significant gaps exist in the chronologies of archaeological remains, drawing further attention to those periods which yield a greater amount of both material and written records. Our attention is drawn toward the Iron Age steppes of eastern Inner Asia both from ancient accounts of powerful nomad groups and ostentatious tombs of steppe rulers unearthed in the last century. Historians and archaeologists alike combine these into conglomerate pictures of contemporary phenomena which depict a grandiose and dominant force of imperial nomads (Batsaikhan 2003), but the ostensible concurrence of historical and archaeological evidence during the Iron Age should not ignore finer details or discrepancies between sources. In this chapter, I review the varied approaches which have defined the interdisciplinary field of historical archaeology and propose appropriate methods for analyzing and integrating the texts and materials related to the Iron Age steppe polity known as the Xiongnu.

The intersection of text and artifact in cohesive studies over the past few decades has spurred epistemological discussions on the methods for suitable integration (Little 1991; Fienman 1997; Andr n 1998; Funari, Hall and Jones 1999; Boyd, Erwin and Hendrickson 2000; Moreland 2001; Wells 2001; Galloway 2006; Hall and Sillman 2006;

Isayev 2006). Do texts and artifacts constitute completely independent sets of data or intrinsically necessitate separate theoretical models? Until recently, their interplay has resulted in divisive dichotomies which limit our understanding of them and the ability to engage in true *inter-disciplinary* work. The primary hurdle to a collaborative study of texts and materials lies in the traditional concepts associated with the field known as historical archaeology. This field of study and its theoretical considerations has typically been consigned to the recent past (Orser 1996, 2004; Hicks and Beaudry 2006), and many of the constrictive categories stem from the foundations of historical archaeological theoretical debates within the realm of the European colonialism and the origins of the modern globalized world.

Discrete theoretical and analytical disciplines of history and archaeology have formed around the investigations of texts and artifacts, respectively. However, the studies of material culture and written documents are not inherently discordant, nor have they always been so estranged (Isayev 2006). Collingwood's (1956: 9) *res gestae* definition of history as aiming to find out "actions of human beings that have been done in the past" might concur with the recent emphases on agency theory in anthropological archaeology, and some scholars in the UK even encourage archaeology to "recapture its traditional links with history (Hodder and Hutson 2003: 125). In the European scholarly traditions, archaeology had come out of historical disciplines. As Collingwood (1956) and other historians had pushed for history to be "an investigative science...imbued with critical thinking about a dynamic past," the New Archaeology movement developed in the United States a decade later also advocated archaeology as an empirical science.

The so-called “Annapolis School” of historical archaeology, spearheaded by Mark Leone in the midst of this new movement, however, veered away from the concepts of agency in archaeological interpretation (Wilkie and Bartog 2000: 748). For North America, the archaeological investigation of past periods when historical documents existed began with the study of colonization by European powers. This field of archaeology, thus labeled historical archaeology, became equated with the archaeology of capitalism (Leone and Potter 1999). The use of the term “historical archaeology” in other regions subsequently led to the uncritical adoption of the assumptions of the Annapolis School and its archaeology of capitalism to areas overseas (Hicks 2004: 102).

Divisive Dichotomies

The first problematic assumption is a division between *historic* and *prehistoric* archaeology, segregating our theoretical models for societies of the past based on whether or not they produced writing. This begins as a temporal division between those societies before and after the advent of writing – otherwise known as the Great Divide. Despite endeavors to extend the field of historical archaeology to include *pre-historic* or *non-historic* (i.e. non-literate or non-text-producing) societies, binary notions of societies according the presence or absence of texts persist in models of sociopolitical development and in models of interaction. In the case of the Xiongnu, who did not produce any of their own texts (that we know of), the appellation of an *illiterate society* becomes problematic. Their intense interaction with the adjacent text-rich Chinese society, as well as the presence of literate Chinese advisors in service at the Xiongnu court, raises the issue of whether all the agents of the Xiongnu polity were illiterate. I will

pursue this in more detail in chapter four, but mention this here as justification for utilizing the longer term of *non-text-producing* to denote a society which did not produce writings of its own nature though may well have had members who were capable of reading and using documents produced by or according to outside traditions.

Deetz (1977), in his study of early American life, defines historical archaeology as the study of remains of literate societies, thus demarcating the time of non-literate native societies from the arrival of the literate Europeans in the fifteenth century. Wolf (1982) attempts to broaden our considerations of the Age of Discovery by investigating the native populations, or “peoples without history,” in regions the Europeans colonized. The phrase of “peoples without history” was meant to be an ironic piece of his book title and was not meant to imply that the native societies were without a past or without means, oral or otherwise, to remember their past (Wolf 1982: x). However, the associated models of interaction continued to focus of dichotomies of power and complexity, and the lines along which they were drawn were those between the societies that produced writings and the peoples without historical documents.

A related model, labeled the Tribal Zone (Ferguson and Whitehead 1992), frames spheres of interaction along the dichotomy between state and non-state societies. Notions of political and military superiority of state entities coming into contact with relatively less complex groups dominate accounts by literate societies³ and the resulting theoretical models of zones of interaction. Such models serve well the case studies of larger expanding states on the horizons of less cohesive groups. They propose that the local

³ Francisco de Vitoria’s 1532 proposal in *De Indis et de jure belli relectiones* (*On the Indians and the Law of War*) epitomizes the manner of writing which, although it attempts to speak on behalf of the native tribes, still embodies biases and judgments of the literate narrating society (de Vitoria 1991).

groups converge into tribes for the purpose of meeting the challenge of an expanding external force. The application of the Tribal Zone model to the expanding frontiers of ancient empires, such as the Romans (Mattingly 1992), however, epitomizes the construction of models which situate these literate empires in the position of political and military superiority within their peripheral zones of interaction. Those which come into contact with the empires form new political entities and change their styles of warfare in order to repel the intruding conquests. Models of imperial expansion consistently frame the frontiers as represented by less formidable sociopolitical entities. Though such groups continually exist in zones of interaction and imperial expansion, even the history of the twentieth century has shown us examples of empires facing off with other empires in the competition for territory.

As it will be shown in the historical narratives of the Han Chinese empire (see chapter four), not all frontiers presented a disparate group of weaker, less complex competitors. The nature of the Han interactions with the Xiongnu entity was not a state–non-state interaction but the abutting of two large states that fluctuated in relationships of power and hegemonic superiority. The emergence of the Xiongnu polity is tied inexorably to the crisis of the sudden northward expansion of the Qin Chinese empire and its redrawing of the frontier lines that robbed the Xiongnu tribes of significant amounts of land (Di Cosmo 1999b, 2002). On the other hand, humiliating military failures of the subsequent Han Chinese empire in the face of the new, and southwardly expanding, Xiongnu state persisted for several generations, stirring the Chinese to change the character of their armies. In short, many of the models based on the premise of an

inherent imbalance of power which favored the literate society falls short in the face of case studies such as the Xiongnu empire.

Schemes of civilized-versus-barbarian hinge upon concepts of expanding “civilizations,” whether recent Europeans or ancient Romans, against less civilized groups and are entwined with dichotomies of power (Hartog 1988: 340). Hassig (1992) argues through the example of Spanish conquistadores that such expanding legions have numerous advantages over the native peoples, including the attracting of defectors and the non-restrictive goal of spoils of war. Though no documented cases exist of Spanish soldiers defecting to the side of the native tribes, Hassig’s model of interaction perpetuates the concept of inherent power disparity and precludes the possibility of defections in both directions. For why would a civilized Spanish soldier flee to the ranks of the uncivilized natives? Case studies like the interaction between the text-rich Han Chinese empire and the non-text-producing Xiongnu steppe entity of East Asia – in which defections occurred across both sides – propound the need for new models of understanding the non-text-producing societies which literate societies have narrated. Emphases on oral traditions have tried to break the equation of without-writing to without-history (Faubion 1993), but the overriding contrasts between more and less “advanced” societies hinder the construction of alternative understandings (Funari, Hall and Jones 1999: 4-5).

Writing has an undoubted effect upon the structuring of society, yet assumptions have persisted that a society without writing is inherently less complex, and, in the scheme of the above-mentioned dichotomies, less civilized and less powerful. The Great Divide discriminating “peoples without history” has furthered the conceptual as well as

chronological division between prehistoric and historic societies, yet theories of material culture and social complexity should not bifurcate along this division (Funari, Hall and Jones 1999: 8). Perhaps, then, the distinction of historical archaeology should discard evolutionary constructs of social complexity. Rather than a chronological difference between *pre-* and *post-*historic archaeologies – a distinction which intrinsically assumes a clear divide and hierarchy of complexity from societies *without* to societies *with* writing – one might delineate between the studies of past societies with or without the availability of written documents to do so.

Orser (2004: 5) claims the field of historical archaeology as one of a recent past and in opposition to the more broadly defined text-aided archaeology. Little (1991: 1), in the outset of her book entitled *Text-Aided Archaeology*, adopts these designations and defines text-aided archaeology as a more inclusive field that “encompasses human activity in any time or place for which documentation aids interpretation.” The term text-aided archaeology, however, implies a primacy of the material record with the aid of written documents when needed. The acknowledged biases of many historical documents have led some scholars to advocate material remains as less influenced by human prejudice and thus “closer” to the real past (Kosso 2001), but intentionality and biases affect all sources from the past. Furthermore, the historical record is deemed limited to the study of states with literature, whereas the archaeological record grants access to states with and without literature as well as to non-state societies (Patterson 2000). Yet numerous historical studies, in their discussions of narratives of the “Other,” have engaged those people without writing and who do not necessarily aggregate as large political entities (cf. Hartog 1988). Historical accounts and archaeological remains both

represent sparse and limited records of the past. To characterize one resource as intrinsically more valid than another for the study of the past would reflect an unjustifiable approach and unbalanced integration of historical and archaeological resources.

Little's (1991) broadened definition of a study that integrates texts and materials should perhaps be embraced with a different label – one which incorporates the sources of both historical and archaeological disciplines. In many regions of the world, an integrated approach has been employed in period fields such as Classical and Medieval archaeology, but all of these fields share a basic methodological approach not dependant on particular conditions or content (Hall and Sillman 2006).⁴ One may see an important semantic difference between Deetz's (1977) definition of historical archaeology as the study of remains *of* literate societies in contrast with the Funari, Hall and Jones (1999) definition as the study of remains of societies *for which* we have written records (my italics). Deagen (1996: 16) also breaks with the equations of historical archaeology with literate societies by defining the field as “concerned with civilizations documented *in some form* by written records” (again, my italics). I thus propose to define historical archaeology not as a distinct chronological or regional field but rather an approach, and not to the study of societies *with* written records but the study of societies *through* written records and material remains.

⁴ Hall and Sillman (2006) further imply, through the title of the introduction to their edited volume *Historical Archaeology*, that this field as it is defined according to European powers and the history of capitalism should perhaps be entitled “Archaeology of the Modern World” and considered a sub-field of a greater historical archaeological discipline.

Integrative Approaches to an Interdisciplinary Field

Schuyler (1978: 202) posed the question of whether historical archaeology is a discipline or a technique, and recent literature has answered with a resounding call to consider it a general technique that incorporates the diverse methods associated with all the evidence available for a particular society (Andr n 1998; Funari, Hall and Jones 1999; Galloway 2006; Hall and Sillman 2006; Isayev 2006). To pose a further question, however, is there such a thing as a discrete field of historical archaeology, or, by the use of the term do we simply mean to invoke an interdisciplinary approach to the study of past societies? The term itself contains a duality of history and archaeology, and while these constitute the two major disciplines employed in the interdisciplinary study of past societies, the uses of sources should not be compartmentalized in a dualistic fashion. This would be equally as inhibitive as numerous other dichotomies hinted at above (cf. Johnson 1999: 23). Artifacts may be read as a sort of narrative text (Hodder 1986) and texts are artifacts in their own right (Wendrich et al. 2003; Galloway 2006).

This discussion opens a second question, namely, do texts and artifacts constitute independent sets of data, produced by different social processes and requiring distinct methods of analysis (Small 1999), or are they products of the same social processes (Johnson 1999)? Similar social processes may lead to their formation, but they often proceed through different “social lives” (Appadurai 1986) beyond their creation which qualify them as distinct sources of information. These corpuses of data should be considered distinct for analysis not because they are text and artifact but because they are different material forms and constitute distinct representations of society created,

deposited, preserved, and selected through different discourses (Galloway 2006: 44). By this argument, then, two sources within a single discipline, whether it archaeology or history, could be considered products of different social lives. Conversely, some sources from typically separate disciplines may have more in common with each other than materials from the same disciplines (Isayev 2006: 602). We should therefore proceed with separate analyses of each of the textual and material sources, but not limit our methods and questions of those sources to lines of inquiry conventional to the separate fields of archaeology and history with which they most typically are associated.

Historical narratives, when present, have traditionally framed reconstructions of the past. Archaeologists have warned against a “tyranny of the text” and instead suggested that archaeology has the ability to “subvert” the dominant historical narratives (Funari, Hall and Jones 1999: 8). But just as culture historians have often selected portions of the material record to fill in the gaps of historical narratives, so have archaeologists been selective in their use of written records to corroborate their materially based deductions (Fienman 1997). A truly integrated approach presents the ability not of one source to fill in the gaps left by the other but to jointly address the “spaces within and between” the minimal sources of both history and archaeology (Galloway 2006).

Discrepancies between sources may produce new insights which do not necessitate the abandonment of previous narratives but restructure those narrative elements within new heuristic contexts (Andr n 1998; Wendrich et al. 2003). We may propose conclusions that purport understandings not only different from but opposite from what is typically expected from the traditional narratives and the evidence from which they are created. It is thus not the goal to *subvert* dominant narratives, of either

history or archaeology, but rather build upon and “*ironicize* master narratives” which have dominated our understandings (Johnson 1999: 34).

The third challenge to a productive historical archaeological approach is to surpass *cross-* or *multi-*disciplinary studies and create a truly *inter-*disciplinary investigation (Isayev 2006). Sources of different forms or from different social lives should be analyzed separately but require a common research goal to frame these independent analyses so that they may be brought together for synthesis. Historical archaeology inquiries should utilize common theoretical terms (Patterson 2000) and formulate research questions that allow both disciplines to equally contribute to new understandings (Laurence 2004: 106-7). This requires an integrative approach at the outset of investigation, and will likely lead to research outcomes that would not have been possible through any one discipline or resource (Isayev 2006: 600).

Contexts of Correspondence

Philosophical dichotomies between history and archaeology (Kosso 2001) raise unnecessary barriers between the entangled disciplines (Fienman 1997; Johnson 1999; Boyd, Erwin and Hendrickson 2000), but we should maintain distinctions between variant sources of analysis. A holistic integration of research approaches and contexts which define the individual sources (Kowalewski 1997) affords an interdisciplinary approach while acknowledging the particular character of each textual and material resource. Such integration does not presume that elements of these resources naturally match one to the other (Hartog 1988) and neither do they merge in a mutually exclusive, complimentary fashion with a “sum zero” result (Andr en 1998). For the integrated

analysis of textual and material evidence, I adopt a multi-faceted approach that attempts to explain incongruencies as well as consider apparent equivalencies between entire sets of data and individual elements. In the following discussion, I illustrate the values of these approaches through the examples of accoutrements in Celtic burials, reconstructions of society in ancient Japan, sociopolitical developments in Bronze Age China, and the nature of élites in early Anglo-Saxon England.

Andrén (1998) outlines several analytical contexts of correspondence between sources, encouraging the engagement by traditions of more than one framework of investigation. The more conventional, culture-historical approach has been to match names in the texts to objects, features, or groups in the material record. This *identification correspondence* assumes that the divisions outlined in the texts are necessarily manifested with the same scope and meaning of divisions in the material record. Hierarchical divisions of societies outlined in written accounts are often equated one to one with categorical divisions of remains in the archaeological record, and names of groups provided in the written records are also applied to particular and bounded sets of material remains, conflating ethnic, cultural and political identities within a single designation.

Single components from one source may at times help to explain single components from another without equating entire systems. Arnold (1999) utilizes descriptions of Celtic drinking and feasting habits to understand the feasting equipment in élite Gallic graves of the seventh to fifth century BC. The tendency for otherwise rich burials to contain few or only one metal or ceramic drinking vessel, in contrast to the many large wine containers, might seem an anomaly in archaeological reconstructions of

a society centered on communal drinking rites. However, accounts of the Celts drinking “round the vessel” and using a “common cup” might explain the small number of drinking vessels (Arnold 1999: 73). The propensity to record bizarre customs in the configuration of narratives about “exotic” foreign peoples should caution one against interpolating entire societies from these descriptions, but one need not totally abandon cross-comparisons. The exercise of purporting all elements in one resource as retaining correlates in a second source, however, runs the risk of equating entire systems and matching the divisions of one to the categories of another. Rather than matching whole systems of classifications along a series corresponding elements, we should instead construct discursive frameworks outside the biases of the individual sources and within which to discern corresponding dynamics between them.

Farris (1998) addresses endeavors to reconstruct ancient Japan through texts and materials in his book *Sacred Texts and Buried Treasures*. The first chapter, entitled “The Lost Realm of Yamatai,” summarizes attempts to identify specific realms and individual people from the historical accounts within particular landscapes and individual tombs. The Yamatai 邪馬台 polity of the Wa 倭 people of the Japanese archipelago described in mainland Chinese chronicles of third century AD has been hotly debated, and conflicting theories on its exact location and socio-political character persist. Aside from recounting various attempts to search for the exact location of the “lost realm” and the grave of its legendary shamaness ruler Himiko 卑彌呼, an effort derived to combine accounts of the Japanese foreigners by the mainland Chinese with burial practices examined by archaeologists in Japan to reconstruct the nature of the Wa society and polity. Farris first

presents the historical narratives of the chronicler Chen Shou 陳壽⁵ in order to examine the Chinese text, and what unfolds is the use of historical and archaeological critiques and comparative data to test hypotheses formed by Chen's statements. Instead of reconstructing third and fourth century Japan according to a set of validated – as opposed to those invalidated – descriptions within Chen's accounts, one might proceed first from a research question not couched in the concepts of a third century Chinese chronicler but from social theoretical models that would frame a line of inquiry asked of both the Chinese accounts and the Japanese mortuary record. Rather than attempting to match entire sets of elements from different sources, one might appose the dynamics evident within one corpus of information to those of another.

The comparison of different groups of sources and their investigations may yield either correlative or contrasting results, and the collaborative interpretation of both manners of analytical outcome provides the fullest examination of the society or peoples in question. Rather than present distinct counterparts between individual elements of varied narratives, *correlation correspondences* search for similar patterns in the overall dynamics of distinct sources. Falkenhausen (2006: 326-369) evidences a progressive differentiation between upper and lower strata of ranked élite in late Bronze Age China, manifested in a shift from gradated quantitative differences in grave structure and goods assemblages to a distinct qualitative gap. Billowing changes from the eighth to fifth

⁵ Chen Shou compiled the voluminous work *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo zhi* 三國志) between 285-97, of which the chapter on the Wa (also called Wo) people (*Wo ren zhuan* 倭人傳) was one section. The state of Wei 魏, one of the three kingdoms and that which Chen served, engaged in diplomatic and trade relations with the Yamatai state that Himiko supposedly ruled at the time of Chen's writing. Chen's travels and official work placed him mostly in south China, and he clearly drew upon his experiences there in his descriptions of other people and places.

century BC led to “a redefinition of privileges and a ritual diversification” that contrasted greatly with the previous continuous gradations of hierarchies expressed in the mortuary arena (Falkenhausen 2006: 365).

Drawing on extensive accounts and treatises regarding the Warring States period of early China (481-221 BC), Lewis (1999) expounds a contraction of power in the formation of a ruler-centered state through the supplanting of previous ruling lineages and establishment of de facto branches as well as the culling of hereditary peripheral fiefs and assertion of the ruling court over encroaching ministers and local lords. The mortuary record and court documents of mid to late first millennium BC China might then *correlate* enough to equally support a milieu of the elevation of the personage of the ruler and his lineage. While court documents and some political treatises no doubt emphasized the potency and legitimacy of the ruling lineage – or at least the means to achieve such levels – the mortuary record suggests that the new privileged stratum included a few subordinate lineages in addition to the ruling family (Falkenhausen 2006: 365). This manner of *contrast* between different narratives should also be incorporated into our understanding of past societies.

When material conditions are out of phase with patterns in the written record, such *contrastive correspondences* provide an archaeological avenue to reach beyond the textual narratives with the aid of the texts. Härke (1990, 1997b) critiques the standard association of weaponry with warriors and militarization in the example of fifth to seventh century Anglo-Saxon England. He observes a sudden increase in weapon burials at the point of decrease in battles mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. As a peaceful period wanes and accounts of fighting increase, the quantity of weapon burials decreases

significantly. Though an equation of weaponry to militant warriors may often be viable, the élite of sixth century Anglo-Saxon society appear to have interred their deceased males with intricate weaponry during a period of relative peace. Härke proposes that these swords, axes and seaxes buried in opulent graves were symbols that linked the deceased to the dominant Germanic groups by invoking the power of their preceding conquest myth, rather than denoting any particular warrior status for military purposes of engagement. The divergent dynamics of the chronicles and the burials do not create an obstacle of contradiction. Instead, their contrastive nature leads Härke to propose new contexts for understanding the ornate weapons and the means of expressing political power.

In the following chapters, I begin with an investigation of dynamics apparent within the archaeological record of the eastern steppes and then examine the written records concerning the steppe groups. Chronologies of excavated material reveal particular changes in traditions, and classifications of the material demonstrate divisions that may relate to social strategies or institutions. Questions generated from these examinations are then compared to the chronologies of events, social institutions, and political actors as narrated in the texts. A comparison of the results of these separate analyses must precede any extensive cross-comparative considerations of the individual elements from either corpus of information. Particular components of the archaeological and historical records are then examined within the new contexts of investigation that are based on a common research agenda and created by an understanding of the correlative and contrastive relationship between the variant narratives.

Intentionality and the Interpretation of Narratives

In his analysis of early medieval society, Williams (2006) recognizes the commemorative agendas of many texts while also acknowledging the commemorative nature of burials as similarly constructed memories. While these sources certainly do not convey direct reflections of the past, they constitute a conglomerate of “cloudy mirrors” (Durrant 1995) and multi-faceted “halls of mirrors” (Parker-Pearson 1999; Härke 1997a) from which modern scholars formulate an understanding of the past. The intentions of the creators explicate social and political goals and strategies, and in turn illuminate systems constructed upon those strategies to reach those goals (Jensen and Nielsen 1997; Härke 1997a). In this manner, the intentions of the constructed material objects and spaces as well the written narratives bring us closer to an understanding of past societies. The monuments and manuscripts not only purport a structural reality but also expound a system of dynamics.

Throughout our attempts to understand past societies and peoples we are reminded that materials and monuments do not provide direct inferences. In the mortuary record, burials do not simply reaffirm a static social structure and are often open to manipulation (Parker-Pearson 1999: 84). Interments are affected by individual motivations of the groups that inter the deceased, and models of agency have been increasingly employed to address these issues (Earle 1997), especially in instances of prestige systems and rituals (Robb 1999). Concepts of agency afford a theoretical linkage between cultural ideas and individual behavior (Robb 1999: 3) and provide an explanation for change alternate from evolutionary determinism.

The controversy between direct interpretations of social order versus ritual explanations and political manipulations can be reconciled as equally important perspectives, all of which exerted an influence upon the interments (Brown 1995; O'Shea 1995). Flad (2002) demonstrates the distinct character of ritual offerings of the living from those goods associated directly with the deceased. In his analysis of graves at an early Bronze Age site in Inner Mongolia, he shows a lack of strong correlation between the quantity and quality of *ceremonial* goods of the funerary rites and that of *deceased* goods associated directly with the interred individual. We may thus see the presence of materials related to the funeral rites conducted by the living, and reflecting their own dynamics, and those materials which reflect more the role of the deceased at death. This role, however, is still open to interpretation, and the artifacts associated with the deceased may not equate with the assumptions at which archaeologists most often arrive. Härke (1997b) clearly demonstrates the function of ornate weaponry as symbols of political prestige rather than just tools of fighting or emblems of military prowess.

While burials may present constructed images of past societies and divergences due to independent actions, interments nevertheless tend to gravitate toward social rules and systematics of funeral rites that reflect particular aspects of society. We may address the ceremonial involvement of the living, and their individual motivations, as an independent variable, whilst understanding the burial goods more directly associated with the deceased not as simple reflections of society but nevertheless affected by the contentions of society. The biases and individual intentionality of burial data do not pose hindrances, rather the intentions within the process of interment are crucial to interpreting the society (Jensen and Nielsen 1997: 35).

In the case of non-text-producing societies peripheral to literate civilizations, textual narratives are limited to those compiled by chroniclers outside the society in question. The biases that must be navigated in such outside narratives relate to the often “exoticized” character of the foreign peoples and the expression of the practices and institutions of the foreign “other” through, and to a certain degree interpret them in relation to, terms and concepts of the narrating society (Di Cosmo 2002; Arnold 1999; Farris 1998; Hartog 1988; Nash 1976; Tierney 1960). Furthermore, accounts of foreign non-text-producing societies tend to assemble normative representations constructed in terms of the narrating culture (Di Cosmo 2002; Wells 2001; Hartog 1988). Despite tendencies of the foreign narrators to sculpt the foreign peoples in their own terms or erect biased concepts of foreign entities for the benefit of their own politics, certain social customs and political organs may still be glossed from the texts. This requires an understanding of the normative concerns of the narrating society and what frameworks guided their constructions for narratives about the foreign (Di Cosmo 2002; Tierney 1960).

In his critique of the Greek understanding of the Scythians, *The Mirror of Herodotus*, Hartog (1988: 237) purports a rhetoric of otherness which makes the “other” conceivable. By dubbing such accounts rhetoric, he does not argue that the narratives are pure fiction meant to deceive or that they were deliberately Hellenocentric. The aim of chronicles such as Herodotus’ accounts of the Scythians was to convey what is different through translation. Hartog recognizes two Herodotus’: the historian and the ethnographer, the rhapsode and the surveyor, the chronicler of events and accountant of the “other.” Herodotus was certainly well-known as a great traveler in the Greek world

and beyond, as was Sima Qian 司馬遷 of early imperial China, the compiler of the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji* 史記), and both writers drew upon a wealth of personal experience to describe the various people and places in their histories. Chen Shou traveled on many diplomatic missions throughout the south for the Chinese rulers, and the eventual Roman ruler Caesar, was himself on campaigns which brought him through foreign lands with foreign peoples. Both these narrators were both certainly well versed in the literature of their predecessors who had formulated narratives of the “other” with historic and ethnographic elements (Hartog 1988) and normative and empirical tendencies (Di Cosmo 2002). Once we understand the framework of narrative within which the chroniclers worked and their particular experiences and available literature, we may work to disentangle episodic and cultural components of the textual resources which might inform us of the past society.

Archaeologists and historians alike have utilized the analogy of misunderstood mirrors to reassess our means of viewing the past (Parker-Pearson 1999; Härke 1997a; Durrant 1995; Hartog 1988). The mirrors are cloudy, in multiples, or otherwise distorted, yet there seems to be no intention of discarding these mirrors. The images they give us are imperfect but not without use once we come to understand the nature of the distorted images we see. Since it is crucial to understand the biases we carry with us and the intentionalities of the creators through which we view the documents and the material objects and spaces, then perhaps we should speak less of mirrors and more of lenses, like the lens of ritual through which we view human remains and their contexts of deposition (Falkenhausen 2006). Archaeological and historical records are both shrouded in

numerous layers of intention, lenses of bias and constructed realities through which we view the past.

Delineating Groups in History and Archaeology

When attempting to define groups for analysis, we must remain cognizant of the numerous intertwined and layered kin, cultural, social, and political identities which peoples of the past held. Expressed identities often depended on the manner and sphere of action or interaction. They were at times open to individually manipulated expression and at others constrained by institutionalized distinctions. In our attempts to categorize, label, and understand the peoples and socio-political systems in which they operated, we, as researchers of the past, must utilize remnants which retain multiple expressions, as well as attributions, of identity and varied degrees of intentionality in those expressions.

Expressed and attributed identities appear most often as delineations in opposition to other groups. Among the most frequently ascribed designations lies ethnicity – a culturally constructed identity associated with particular customs and *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977), often purporting common descent of its members (Jones 1997). Many investigations of non-text-producing groups peripheral to those civilizations that created written documents have increasingly relied on material studies to characterize the customs and systems of such societies. Materially defined archaeological cultures have then been matched to names and within texts as equivalent ethnic groups of corresponding customs and kin distinctions. In order to properly integrate the information given for groups named within the texts with the observed materials remains, we must first truly understand the nature of the cultural-historical designations and the manner in

which they have been applied. Ethnicity is defined not only in terms of material culture, but also cultural dispositions and descent, any one of which may be emphasized more than the other. We must understand that “temporally and spatially bound distributions of material culture...do not necessarily ‘map’ the extent and boundaries of self-conscious ethnic groups in the past” (Jones 1997: 120), and since ethnicity is a concept, neither should biology be directly equated with an ethnic label (Tyrell 2000: 150). Groups which differentiate themselves along lines of descent, ritual or *habitus* may yet share the same styles and forms of commodities which would define them as a single group, and vice versa. Distinctions in the archaeological record correlated to an exact ethnic group thus become problematic at best (Falkenhausen 2006: 243).

Perhaps the difficulty lies in the concept of trying to understand *the* identity for the people of a distinguishable group in the archaeological record. Since people retained multiple layers of identity, different aspects of material culture within a single context, such as a burial or burial ground, could then relate to varied levels of distinctions. Ethnicity has previously been considered a “static normative backdrop,” but the construction and manipulation of various ethnonyms demonstrate their active role in social processes (Jones 1997: 28) and even a tool of politics and conquest (Smith 2005). It is in this realm that we find most of the delineations of non-text-producing groups outside of the text-producing civilizations.

Cultural-Historical Designations in the Chronicles of “Others”

Group names can denote any level of cohesion of kinship lines, shared traditions, or political unity, yet their application to a delineated group does not necessarily imply the complete convergence of all kin, cultural, and political notions of association. Names can be “dangerously non-specific” when they are indiscriminately ascribed to members which share some facets in common while exhibiting clear social, cultural or even political differentiation that might otherwise be assumed under the broad application of a name (Arnold and Gibson 1995: 2). Names for the “other” peoples encountered by literate civilizations have often been applied, by both modern researchers and ancient chroniclers, as ethnic labels which gloss over differences among the peoples in question and assume kin and cultural solidarity when often only social-political ties or smaller restricted groups are meant by the nomenclatures that find their way into the historical accounts.

Single names which perhaps come from the groups immediately adjacent to the narrating society, or with which the narrating society most directly interacts, are then used to apply to all those in that direction or vicinity. The cultural designation of Wa is applied to the entirety of the Japanese archipelago by the ancient Chinese historians, implying the unification of all those peoples when in actuality the only group with which the Chinese appear to have negotiated, and those known details about, was the Yamatai, a polity among many in that area (Farris 1998). The name Keltoi was perhaps the name of the peoples directly to the north of the Greeks, but it seems to have been used to refer to all those barbarians to the north, now designated as Celts (Arnold and Gibson 1995).

The act of “translating-labeling” the outside peoples provided names that acted both as proper nouns as well as labels with new meanings, composed in a transliterated form from the original language into the narrating one (Hartog 1988).⁶ The label of Scythian thus came to stand for peoples of the north as well as connote nomadic peoples. Similarly, the Chinese term of Hu胡, which perhaps had its origins as an ethnonym, became a sort of “anthropological type” connoting mounted mobile steppe peoples to the north (Di Cosmo 2002: 128-131). The name was blanketly synonymous with a collection of variant groups, and preceding qualifiers specified particular groups among the Hu-type northerners; for instance, the Lin Hu林胡 (Forest Hu) in the northern bend of the Yellow River and the Dong Hu東胡 (Eastern Hu) in present-day Manchuria. Before the preponderance of the term Hu in the late first millennium BC, discussions of northerners at the periphery were accompanied with the labels of Rong戎 and Di狄. Within different sources and across several centuries variant geographic and animalistic qualifiers were also added to these labels. Such qualifiers as Quan Rong犬戎 (Dog Rong), Shan Rong山戎 (Mountain Rong), Bei Rong北戎 (Northern Rong), and Li Rong驪戎 (Black Horse Rong) stand apart from designations that retain no standard meaning and appear more as transliterations, like Luhun Rong陸渾戎 Yiluo Rong伊洛戎.

To regional archaeologists following culture-historical lines of thought, these names, both of large and small divisions, have often become synonymous with particular

⁶ Many of the names for northern foreign groups in early China constructed translated-labels with bestial similes – the characters for Di 狄 and Mo 貉 both retained root meanings, and radicals, related to animals – that considered the foreign groups barbaric due to their lack of proper social and ritual traditions (Pines 2005).

material culture groups (Arnold and Gibson 1995: 2), and parallels between the historical information associated with these names and the archaeological cultures to which they have been ascribed have posed problems, especially for the historiography of the marginal peoples of the ancient world (Burstein 2008: 250). These accounts of the other peoples constitute ethnographies in the content and manner of what they narrate, through surveys of customs, but they should not be confused with emic delineations of ethnicities. Some narratives of these groups contain detailed descriptions of their locale and customs, such that modern researchers have circumscribed them by those particular practices described in the texts and spatially demarcated them in the ancient landscape (Wells 2001: 14).⁷ For some regions, several “nomadic tribes” are mentioned in the texts, and the matching of names to archaeological sites and periods has led to anachronistic uses and inappropriate applications of the names to groups of remains simply by their equivalency to a general type or by assumptions of the location at particular points in history (Burstein 2008: 252-3).

Much of the chronological confusion of these groups and their associated names stems from the “social life” of their supposed ethnographies. The earliest narratives tended to set standards of format for later writings – Herodotus for the Greeks and Sima Qian for the Chinese – and frequently contained both ethnographic descriptions and rhapsodic histories (Tierney 1960; Hartog 1988). Beyond creating a formula for the

⁷ The multi-volume historical-geographical compendium called *The Historical Atlas of China* (*Zhongguo lishi ditu ji* 中國歷史地圖集) (Tan 1996) places the names of ancient foreign groups mentioned by the Chinese historians in areas as distant as central Kazakhstan, for the Kangju 康居, and draws distinct borders around cultural units like the Wusun 烏孫 at the northwestern edge of the Xinjiang province of China. Some of the descriptions of the foreign groups make a general location possible, but one should not conceptualize these groups in geographic terms, much less draw territorial lines between them.

description and annals of foreign peoples, these initial ethnographies tended to be reproduced with little alteration of the original descriptions of customs, thus portraying the peoples subsumed under that specific name as “frozen in time and space” (Burstein 2008: 256). Subsequent ethnographies were, however, not always exact copies.

Nash (1976) argues that Caesar’s descriptions of the Gauls in 50 BC may be considered primary rather than mere plagiarisms of Poseidonios’ ethnography of 80 BC, whom Caesar nevertheless explicitly cited. The narrative of the Xiongnu steppe peoples by the Chinese historian Ban Gu 班固 in late first century AD contained more derogatory descriptions and militant inclinations than that of his predecessor Sima Qian a couple centuries previous (Di Cosmo 2002: 271-2). Despite their contrary concepts of the Xiongnu and how to deal with them, a majority of the sections of Sima Qian’s prose, especially those more ethnographic and empirical in nature, are matched in the account compiled by Ban Gu. It was more often the normative attitudes about the foreign peoples, rather than the empirical descriptions of lifeways, that differed. The standard ethnic characterizations continued in much the same fashion, carrying forward the picture of the unchanging, unvaried group of foreign people. Nevertheless, events and series of changing actors, actions, and theaters mentioned in a single chronicle of “others” betray such depictions of static culture groups. Diachronic understandings of these groups thus become possible, to a certain extent, from analyses of such differences within a text (Burstein 2008: 250-6).

Alternately, changes which sometimes occurred in descriptions between successive accounts are not necessarily indicative of cultural or social change over time.

During the mid first millennium BC, as more groups subsumed under the label of Di狄 pushed further south, the expanding Chinese states pushed north, and these foreign groups began to play more intricate roles in interstate politics, even settling within the spheres of the Chinese states (Di Cosmo 1999a: 947-951). Numerous qualified names, like Chang Di長狄 (Long Di), were also accompanied by binary distinctions, such as the Bai Di白狄 (White Di) of the west and the Chi Di赤狄 (Red Di) of the east, though even some mentions of these two names contradict a strict placement of one in the east and the other in the west. Perhaps because of the more intense involvement of the groups known collectively as the Di within the territories and politics of the Chinese states, chronicles came to differentiate between them. The wars of specific Chinese states mentioned specific Di groups – e.g. the campaigns of the state of Jin晉 with particular mention of the Chi Di. A specified nomenclature of a different sort appeared when an alien Di group established a state solidly within the northern regions of the Chinese sphere. The state of Zhongshan中山, represented magnificently in the archaeological record by a mausoleum of grandiose proportions and opulent furnishings,⁸ is attributed to the Bai Di and said to be founded by the Xianyu鮮虞, a tribe of the Di northern peoples. In this case, we are given a specific name from within a greater designation not as a qualified derivative of the larger label but as a completely new name. Thus, as the alien groups increasingly interacted with and settled among the Chinese, the chronicles of the Chinese continually defined and redefined them.

⁸ The tomb of King Cuo of the Zhongshan state was excavated in the 1970s, though a more recent and complete double volume report has been published (Hebei 1995). For a discussion on the problematic “barbarian” ethnic associations attributed to the mortuary material of the Zhongshan mausoleum, see Falkenhausen (2006: 255-262).

The labeling of foreign groups from the northeast during the first half of the first millennium AD further exemplifies the complex, and often confused, attribution of names in the delineation of cultural and socio-political entities. The groups which resided in present-day northeast China began bearing the geographic label of Eastern Hu (Dong Hu) in the late first millennium BC, while another group of Hu northerners whose steppe polity became the focus of attention for the nascent Chinese empire were also referred to by a more specific name – Xiongnu. By the first century AD, when the northeastern groups began to settle further south within the northern frontier and play a more significant role in Chinese diplomacy and battles against the Xiongnu adversary, the accounts referred to separate “branches” of the Eastern Hu called the Xianbei 鮮卑 and Wuhuan 烏桓. A few centuries later, well after the fall of the Han Chinese empire, the Xianbei were named as separate groups bearing additional individual names such as the Tuoba Xianbei 拓跋鮮卑, Murong Xianbei 慕容鮮卑, and Yuwen Xianbei 宇文鮮卑. Rather than seeing the changes in the narratives as a shift toward more complex tribal divisions within the northern groups, we should understand it as a shift in the narrative concerns of the Chinese historians in their accounts of the foreign groups.

The later records also provided names for numerous distinctions subsumed under the label Xiongnu, well after the demise of the Xiongnu steppe polity, including the mention of a group called the Yuwen Xiongnu 宇文匈奴 (Holmgren 1982). In his brief address to the relationship between Xiongnu and Xianbei, Wei (2004:254) posits the Yuwen as one of the conquered “other tribes” (*biebu* 別部) of the Xiongnu polity. After Xianbei groups are said to have raided the core camps of the Xiongnu, Chinese

chronicles relate an episode in which 10,000 remaining tribes of the Xiongnu, in the wake of the demise of Xiongnu hegemony, proceeded to call themselves Xianbei, thus augmenting and gradually strengthening the Xianbei [*Hou Han shu* 90: 2986]. The perseverance of the designation Yuwen, beyond the labels Xiongnu or Xianbei, and the dramatic and sudden change in names from Xiongnu to Xianbei for hordes of northerners together emphasize the nature of many of so-called ethnic names, and associated their identities, as political, shifting and situational (Jones 1997: 13).

Changes in definitions of foreign groups due to shifting political situations and agendas among the narrating societies (cf. Hartog 1988: 319) also highlight the often political nature of choices in labels and characterizations of foreign groups. Additional significant socio-political divisions among the foreign peoples in northeast China almost certainly existed during times when the Chinese recounted them as a single entity. The labels as they appear in the texts thus seem more representative of political units as defined by, and according to the scales of perception of, the narrating societies that dealt with the outside groups. Observed and recounted traditions were subsumed under a single label derived from the foreign names yet attributed to a group delineated just as much by the narrating people as by the narrated peoples.

Designations presented to or perceived by the literate societies often occurred under political or military circumstances – Caesar’s conquests of northwestern Europe, the Chinese Han empire’s war against the forces of the northern steppes. One can imagine that if the Xiongnu leader, with whom the Chinese court negotiated, indeed made a declaration, as the Chinese sources recount, that among the peoples of the steppes

north of the Great Wall “all are Xiongnu” (皆為匈奴 [*Shiji* 110: 2896]), he would have suggested that numerous tribes and distinct ethnic groups were subsumed under the single name of Xiongnu and thus united into a single political entity under his control.

Ferguson and Whitehead (1992) refer to such amalgamative processes as "tribalization," and while this may be an appropriate appellation for the case studies they compiled, we should perhaps more broadly refer to it as a consolidation process, into whatever larger form, tribal or otherwise, in response to particular pressures or "crises" as Di Cosmo (1999b) outlined. What occurred in the case of the Xiongnu and other steppe empires was much larger than the formation of a so-called tribe. The rapid culmination into a larger political conglomerate is explained by Sneath (2007) as stemming from the organization of groups in the steppes in many periods as a sort of "headless state" which from time to time may grow a head and coalesce under a supra-tribal leader. Instead of reflecting an improbable homogeneity in all traditions and life ways, the larger names such as Xiongnu could have been used more to represent political rather than ethnic cohesion. While such names may express cohesion, and the actions narrated in historical records may evince it, we are often left with the question of how strongly congealed these political entities, observed from the outside, had become. For this, we may also turn to the archaeological record. Since this dissertation relies heavily upon data from burial sites, I will now turn to distinctions expressed materially in funerary traditions.

Material Cultural Delineations in the Mortuary Arena

The death of an individual marks a pivotal moment in life, and those linked to the deceased, including all levels of kin relations as well as those of social or political connections, may be included in the event of interment. The reality of death is often balanced, through funerary rites and monuments, with the duration of the memory of the deceased and the perpetuation of those associated with the deceased (Bloch and Parry 1982). The event of death and the subsequent mortuary rites thus present an arena in which social and political systems may play a part. Funerals and their vestiges – burials – have created and articulated social and political identities through the use of material culture as one of many “technologies of remembrance” (Jones 2003). In the associated items and rites resound the expressions of several, often intertwined and layered, identities – kinship, cultural, ethnic, social, and political – which were asserted *by* different groups, *toward* different groups, and for different purposes. All of these distinctions are themselves constructed in the process of interment, and delineations of social and political status may become confused in the overlaid “panoply of practices” (Parker-Pearson 1999). However, many of these practices can become institutionalized and may be analyzed to reach beyond the manipulating agents in individual instances and elucidate the socio-political systems that influence and structure mortuary practices.

Differences in funerary treatment signify vertical or horizontal distinctions both within a society and between larger entities (McHugh 1999). Horizontal distinctions often demarcate kin, cultural, or ethnic peer groups, but may also extend to social or political divisions, which equally engage in competition. They are often manifested in qualitative differences of style and treatment of materials but do not preclude quantitative

differences. Categories and lines of distinction may stand out in the material record, but it can be difficult to attribute those distinctions to a particular set of categories – ethnic, social or political. The principal concept of horizontal distinctions, however, remains that of peer entities, often in competition, with no inherent articulations of hierarchical differences nor any assumptions of equivalency (McHugh 1999: 142). Additionally, certain distinctions which may seem to express *hierarchical* differences might also reflect a *heterarchical* relationship. The concept of heterarchy has been employed to surpass assumptions that ranking is permanent or ever-present (Brumfiel 1995: 125), while still acknowledging systems of value that are ranked and re-ranked according to changing conditions (Crumley 1995: 4). Many of the social systems, groups or positions that remain distinct within a society may shift in and out of hierarchies of status without redefining their distinguishing labels or traits. A heterarchical approach thus allows for the existence of functionally discrete yet unranked systems within a single society (Brumfiel 1995: 125).

Vertical distinctions refer to regulated demonstrations of ranked differentiation. These are often manifested in sumptuary rules of both quantitative differences of expenditure (Tainter 1977) and qualitative differences of particular objects or practices. They may also reflect a less compartmentalized spectrum of status in societies where sumptuary restrictions do not dictate or dominate mortuary practices. O’Shea (1984) recognizes the extreme difficulties in observing horizontal differences in the mortuary record and distinguishing them from vertical differences, especially since some expressions of difference between groups such as clans may leave no material evidence in the burials. Vertical differences may also find expression in rites which do not

contribute to the material record (Trinkaus 1995). We are thus reminded that while the mortuary record provides numerous articulations of differentiation, it is but a portion of the practices for expressing identity in the mortuary arena, not to mention those practices of other arenas.

Quantitative divergences from sumptuary standards of funerary investment may represent either normative distinctions or degrees of competition which push into upper limits of investiture. In the competing Zhou states of mid first millennium BC China, burials seemed to adhere to qualitative and quantitative sumptuary rules of burial goods, but the exponential growth in size and complexity of kingly tombs reflected escalating assertions of despotic rulers and their associates over the aristocracies from which they frequently came (Thote 2004). Qualitative differences, on the other hand, usually represent clear delineations within or between societies. These distinctions may be viewed within a contemporary “panoply of practices” (Parker-Pearson 1999) or in a diachronic fashion. The increasingly quantitative measures of status distinction beyond the limits of social ranks in the Zhou system of late Bronze Age China eventually met with, and were supplanted by, new qualitative distinctions. The bifurcation of “ordinary” and “special” burial assemblages thereby expressed a growing disjunction between upper and lower élites (Falkenhausen 2006: 365). Normative burial customs, which often horizontally distinguish an entity, may thus be contrasted with major social markers within a system of mortuary traditions, which express vertical, hierarchical distinctions of status (O’Shea 1995).

Particular elements in records of the past may also relate simultaneously to several layers of identity and become entangled in discussions of ethnicity, acculturation,

social structure, and political delineations. Flexed burials and catacomb graves have often been uniformly linked as cultural markers of the Qin 秦 (cs.770-209 BC), yet they exhibit different patterns of appearance in the archaeological record within the regions of the Qin state which was peripheral to the Zhou realm (Teng 2003; Falkenhausen 2004, 2006; Shelach and Pines 2006). Since flexed burials differ from the Zhou practice of extended position, they have been accorded with markers of lower status, but their presence in half of the richest graves precludes such a supposition (Shelach and Pines 2006: 214). Flexed burials may have instead reflected religious ideas and systems characteristic of the Qin. Such ethnic markers differentiating them from traditions of the Zhou realm contrast with burial assemblages of ritual vessels found in these graves that more or less conformed to the sumptuary standards of the Zhou, thus exhibiting a clear desire to emulate and work within the social and political systems of the central realm (Falkenhausen 2004).

Beginning in the fourth century BC, body position, as well as orientation, became more intermixed, and catacomb-shaped niche graves suddenly appeared in growing proportions as the burials abandoned an adherence to the traditional sumptuary rules of the Zhou aristocracy for burial goods (Shelach and Pines 2006; Teng 2003). These catacomb shaped burials have been attributed to the influx of western foreign groups, yet this custom had previously existed in the areas over which the early Qin state had extended. It would seem then that the catacomb graves were not an ethnic marker of an immigrating culture as much as an indication of increased acceptance, within the ranks of society, of a pre-existing practice. The dominance of flexed burials throughout the eighth

to fourth centuries BC, versus the lack of catacomb graves until the fourth century, thus places these customs along different trajectories.

Historical records describe in detail radical institutional social changes in the fourth century BC for the purpose of concentrating power in the hands of the ruler, at the expense of the traditional aristocracies, and extending control throughout the regions of the state and strata of its society (Lewis 1999). The drastic changes in state policies and institutions appear to coincide with the diversity of burial traditions, the shift away from traditional Zhou style burial assemblages, and the elevation of the uppermost echelon of the élite with monumental tomb traditions seen in the Zhou realm. This rift in assemblages of material cultural practices that occurs in the fourth century BC may therefore be the manifestation of drastic changes in political spheres as documented in the texts (Shelach and Pines 2006: 217).

Falkenhausen (2004) is perhaps correct in associating flexed burials more with religious practices rather than essentially linked to political affiliation, but Shelach and Pines (2006: 225) contrarily argue that the presence of flexed burials outside of the Qin area does not preclude them from serving as indicators of political identity, since boundary crossing in cultural practices can be indicative of inter-state interactions. They maintain that we should delineate a cultural or political entity not in a strict qualitative sense through presence or absence but through more flexible quantitative distinctions; in other words, emphasize the predominance of combinations of features, rather than the mere presence of a single trait, as a means of distinguishing groups. However, the assertions of religious, ethnic or political markers do not inherently conflict. Given the mixed concepts of the origins and adoptions of these practices, arguments of how flexed

burials or catacomb graves might be linked to particular ethnic identities seems categorically different from discussions of political delineations. The individual elements, or smaller combinations of elements, perhaps did reflect certain ethnic delineations within the Qin territory. However, the concomitant changes in the mortuary record that resulted in the inclusion of local and westerly traditions, abandonment of Zhou standards of social differentiation, and simultaneous adoption of growing trends in monumentality within the Zhou states to the east all indicate a collectively heterogeneous identity which set them apart from the competing states. This shift within and manipulation of various local ethnic traditions together represents an identity which distinguished them in the political realm.

Mortuary data evidence one of many possible theaters for expressing solidarity or difference, and material culture represents one of many “technologies of remembrance” (Jones 2003) articulating social and political identities. We must be aware of what manner of identity(s) is being expressed and how this relates to the sociopolitical dynamics of the groups or individuals in question. Those in attendance or participating in the rites of interment express the identity of the deceased as related to them as well as to those not in attendance. Their placement of the deceased in a cemetery, and in proximity to other graves, expresses identity in relation to those within the burial ground. When people return to the site for further rites or simply in a process of viewing, they perhaps presume a different relative identity. The space made for interment, treatment of the body, offerings given, goods interred, and commemorative markings erected all provide manifestations of variant social, cultural, ethnic, and political identities through the

choices of practice and material. These may be employed in the study of power politics within and between different groups.

Units of Study in Historical Archaeology

Most forms of identity are expressions of unity for the purpose of demonstrating distinction from those outside the articulated group. I have outlined the ways in which groups manifest coalescence and differentiation through objects, styles, practices, places, and names. These distinctions can be delineated in both material and textual records, and the integrated examinations of these articulations, through correlative and contrastive analyses, allow us to distinguish groups in the past and infer the means for various group identities. But what kinds of entities are being expressed? How may we reconstruct the actions and motivations within and between groups? Vertical discriminations in hierarchies of power and horizontal differentiations in competing peer groups present us with the actors of power politics. In the following chapter I address paradigms of states and empires with the purpose of providing concepts of the entities and actions pertinent to a study of political entities and political practices.

Chapter Three:

PARADIGMS OF POLITICAL ENTITIES

Conceptualizations and cultural labels of steppe groups have often ensnared the imagination and dragged with them, “as if in a trawling net, a whole body of shared knowledge” (Hartog 1988: 319). In this fashion of hauling, a mesh of presumptions have adhered within the political label of nomad empire (cf. Chaliand 2004) and come to categorize all steppe polities as intrinsically more militaristic yet less complex than their sedentary neighbors, and often organized within a tribal kin-based society that lacked the formal political structures to qualify it as a cohesive state. The entity which the Chinese chroniclers identified as the Xiongnu has been touted as one of the earliest examples of the quintessential nomadic empire (Barfield 1989; Chaliand 1995; Grousset 1939; Krادين 2001; Maenchen-Helfen 1973), and this model has dominated theoretical paradigms of Inner Asian states.

Historical records and historical studies alike have traditionally emphasized a pastoral economy, a mobile society, and an ephemeral political structure critically dependant on the outside when characterizing such Inner Asian polities, but more recent historical research has attempted to recognize the multifaceted nature of the steppe economies, beyond the dominant pastoral productions systems, and local stimuli for political formations in addition to exterior influence (Di Cosmo 1994, 1999b). In the process of advancing our understanding of the steppe groups and the polities they formed, I will also attempt to reach outside of archetypal characterizations and unpack the model of nomadic empires. This pursuit does not necessitate the abandonment of the individual

terms, but seeks to deconstruct their combined suppositions in order to allow for more variability in characterizations of the large conquest polities that coalesced in the steppes. I will concentrate less on the equivalency of the Xiongnu phenomenon to a circumscribed political archetype and more on characterizing the institutions and strategies of this particular polity as they are expressed and manifested in the historical and archaeological records. This dissertation thus focuses foremost on the political arena rather than the polity itself.

Economic and subsistence strategies are not the focus of this dissertation, but they deserve a brief summary as they greatly affect the nature of political structures and practices of steppe polities. I therefore first unpack the “nomad” portion into the notions of pastoralism and mobility, taking note first of the variability in economic strategies and the effect of the herd mainstays and second of the variability in habitations patterns throughout the steppes and surrounding regions of eastern Inner Asia. I then address the notion of empire and review the numerous models of empire and the ways in which scholars have defined polities labeled as such. The Xiongnu polity has been labeled with a broad spectrum of terms from tribal confederacy to empire. I do not seek here to determine whether the Xiongnu phenomenon was an empire or a different classification of political entity. Instead, I utilize the variant analytical concepts associated with the studies of polities placed under the rubric of empire to develop a paradigm of research for investigating the large political entity, known as the Xiongnu, that dominated eastern Inner Asia during the Iron Age.

The prevailing package of the nomadic empire poses problems, but the distinct concepts of mobile populations, pastoral economies, extensive strategies of conquest and

control, and even imperial and dynastic rulership still bear great significance to investigations of polities that developed in the steppes. Furthermore, the grand political phenomena of Inner Asia may be illustrated through terms broadly applicable to the formation of polities, as well as concepts common to the particular steppe contexts, and still recognize the individual configurations of different eras and areas. I therefore wish to unpack the label of nomadic empire in order to consider the concepts so often related to polities centered in the Inner Asian steppes while allowing for a variety of configurations and combinations of those concepts and traditions.

Mobile Pastoralists and the Geography of Eastern Inner Asia

Many of the Inner Asian groups of the second century BC were characterized by the Chinese chroniclers as “mobile states” (*xingguo* 行國) whose economy depended solely on “herding livestock” (*suichu* 隨畜), whose people lived by “following grass and water when moving to change [residence]” (*zhu shuicao qianxi* 逐水草遷徙), and whose military was counted in numbers of “those who can draw a bow” (*kongxianzhe* 控弦者) [*Shiji* 110 and 123]. Names such as Scythian and Hu have come to signify peoples of the north, “nomads” – and eventually nothing but nomads (Hartog 1988). Steppe polities and all of their peoples become lumped through a “mistaken equation of a mode of production with a state, that is, the equation of the primary means of subsistence of one group of people in a society with the...state as a whole” (Beckwith 2009: 325). This simplistic view of steppe groups has framed the concept of nomad empires and

dominated interpretations of the historical records, the archaeological material, and investigations of steppe societies.

Numerous scholars have assumed polities formed within the steppes derived from a purely pastoral economy which necessitated wanderings and bred conflict (Kradin 2003), thus also hailing the birth of the mounted warrior, a “strategic culture of the steppe” (Chaliand 2004: xii). The oversimplifications of this model are wrapped up in the concept of the simple, or pure, pastoral nomad wandering the steppes, which has been critiqued as early as Salzman (1972) in his article on “multi-resource nomadism,” and recent scholarship has underscored broad spectrums of mobility and diversities of economies for so-called nomadic societies (Barnard and Willeke 2008; Cribb 1991; Salzman 2002) as well as emphasized variability of regional micro-niches across Eurasia (Frachetti 2008).

The word “nomad” originates from the Greek for “to pasture” and should thus denote pastoralism, but it has come to connote mobile habitation patterns (Salzman 2002: 245). The concept of a “nomad” often simultaneously contains aspects of habitation and subsistence (Khazanov 1994). Many scholars have attempted to diverge the two facets in the use of dualistic terms like nomadic pastoralist and pastoral nomad – *nomadic* suggesting mobility, and *pastoral* indicating the herding of animals (Bar-Yosef and Khazanov 1992; Cribb 1991; Renfrew 2002; Salzman 1972). Cribb (1991) proposes an intersection of these two concepts as continuums along theoretical *x* and *y* axes: modes of subsistence (agriculture to pastoralism) and degrees of mobility (sedentary to nomadic), where increased dependence on pastoral systems is directly proportional to increased mobility. Scholars such as Frachetti (2008) and Sneath (2007) have chosen instead to

employ the distinct modifiers of *mobile* and *pastoral* to talk about groups which may previously have been lumped within the category of nomad. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will simply highlight the necessity to consider modes of subsistence, patterns of habitation, and social structures as distinct yet overlapping concepts, and focus more on political implications of these issues in the example of Eastern Inner Asia.

Sinor (1990) defines Inner Asia more broadly than most scholars, delineated by climate and thus sprawling as far as the Yellow River and the Central Plains of China. Most definitions of Inner Asia connote the regions beyond the core agrarian civilizations like those born out of the Yellow River, and the similar expansive label of “the steppes” usually denotes those same regions, including the grassland steppes, forest steppes along the north, and desert zones along the southern edges. Variations of temperature, elevation, foliage, and precipitation all accompany the changes between these three regions contained within the general label of “the steppes,” and we should thus consider Inner Asia a mosaic of regional environments and correlating economic strategies spanning macro-regions and forming micro-niches (Frachetti 2008: 7).

Patterns of rainfall significantly shaped pasture quality, and thus often correlate with livestock densities (Bazargur 2005; Sneath and Humphrey 1999). These areas may also be sufficient for agriculture (Honeychurch and Amartuvshin 2007), and often exhibit shorter movement patterns, as documented by Simukov in the 1920s and 30s [Figs. 3.2]. The general characterization of herd densities does not, however, take in to account herd compositions. Different animals are optimal in different environments, and may flourish in certain areas where others do not, as is the case with goats and camels [Fig.3.3]. We must be cautious of creating static environmental reconstructions, but the point here is not

changes over time but differences across the expansive landscapes of eastern Inner Asia that greatly affected the multiplicity of lifestyles and economies. In the case of Mongolia, the highest areas of rainfall correspond to the greatest overlap in optimal areas for animals and shorter migration patterns, namely the horses, sheep, and cattle in condensed movements of the groups in Central Mongolia [Figs.3.2,3]. Dyson-Hudson and Dyson-Hudson (1980: 31) purport a pattern of increased territorial behavior with increased pasture value and the decrease in distance moved. If one equates the conflation of summer and winter pastures and decreased mobility with increases in territorialism, then one has returned to assumptions that territorialism correlates with sedentism. The persistence of territorial management by and ownership of land in the Middle Gobi, where herd densities are low and length and frequency of migrations are higher (Fernandez-Gimenez 1999; Simukov 1933), does not support such a model.

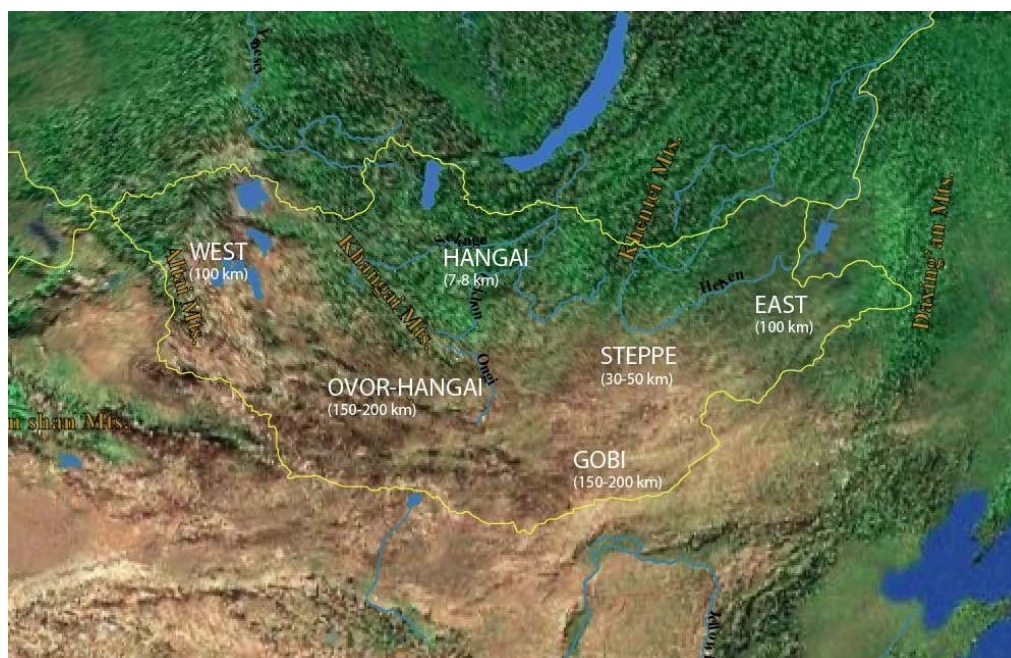


Fig.3.1 Migration pattern groups with average distances traveled (based on Simukov 1933)

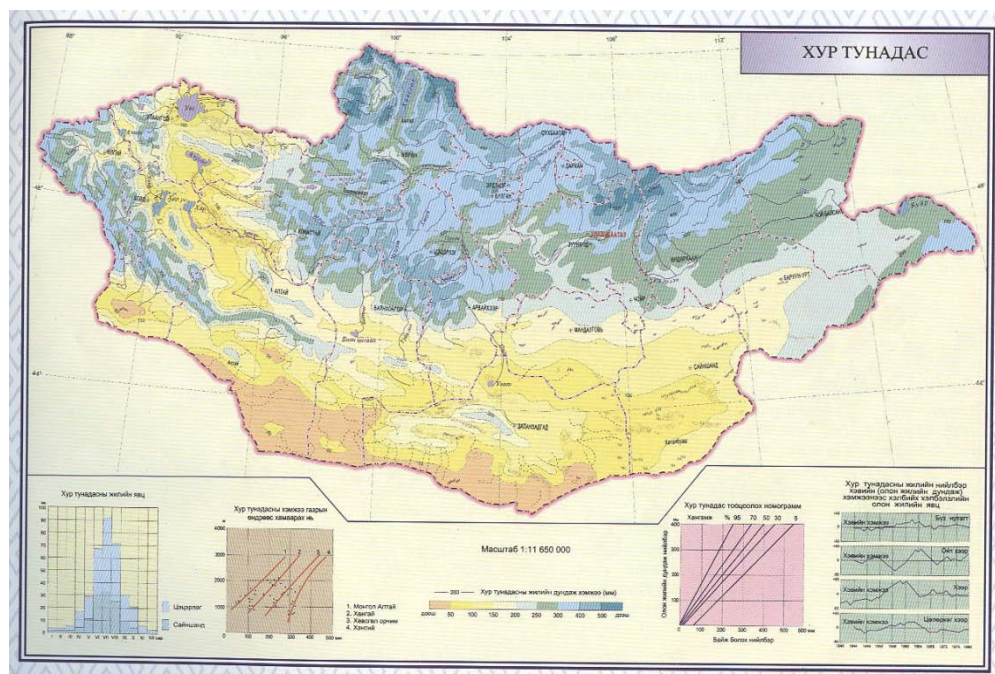


Fig.3.2 Annual precipitation, in increments of 50mm (Tsanjid 2004)

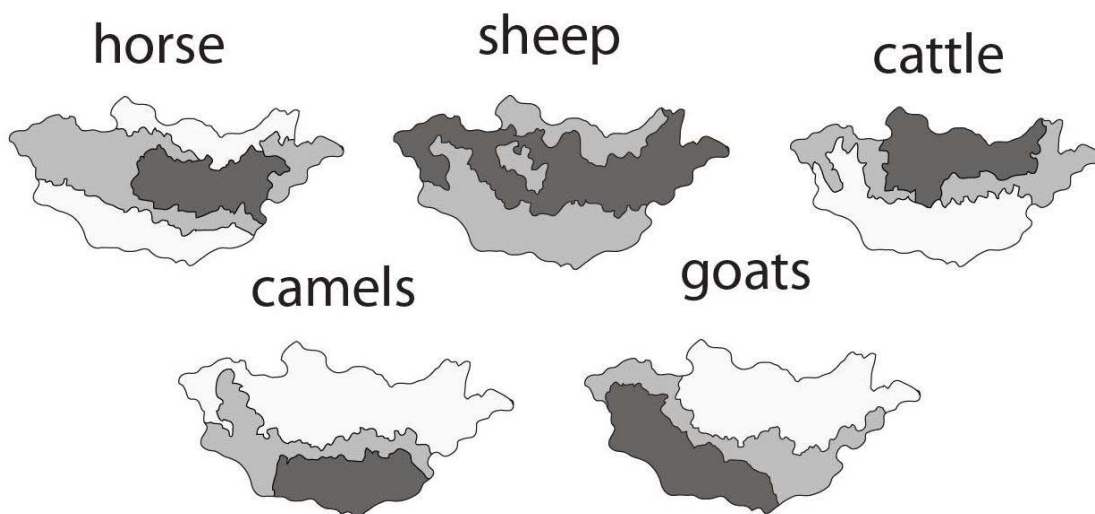


Fig.3.3 Optimal herding areas for variant animals (after Bazargur 2005).⁹

⁹ These are patterns of optimal herding regions, and not the distribution of animal densities. Furthermore, they are based on modern herding strategies and the character of the present environments and should thus not be used as a direct correlate of herd strategies in ancient times. Again, the purpose of mentioning such studies is to emphasize the variability of environments and subsistence strategies across the regions of the historic steppe polities.

While the overlap observed in Central Mongolia should not inherently be equated with an increase in territorialism, it does correlate to an increase in the diversity of resources, both in herd compositions and the presence of greater potential for agriculture. Any observed increases in territorial claims in this region may be a result not of increased herd density but of increased economic diversity, which itself ensures greater economic stability.

Sneath (2007) contends that mobile pastoral ways of life have exhibited no intrinsic limits to political control in any of the historical states of Inner Asia, though the nature of pastoral management and production has been shown in various periods of the twentieth century to greatly affect the character of social networks and economic systems (Fernandez-Gimenez 1999; Sneath 1999a). The household (*ger*) of shared dwelling and shared meals constitutes the smallest social unit. These form residential family groups (*khot-ail*), usually headed by a leader (*darga*) with wealth or experience, that jointly herd livestock and share labor tasks.¹⁰ A complimentary balance often exists within a residential group between animal rich households and those with available labor but few animals. According to the demand for production tasks or the need for extensive herding, the size and makeup of residential groups will vary according to the season. A third group type proposed by Sneath (1999a: 140) is the “ritual family” – a kin-based social category that gathers for significant ritual events but is often otherwise split between residential groups. Since it is constantly changing in size and character, according to kin or

¹⁰ Fernandez-Gimenez (1999) provides a range of two to twelve households per *khot-ail* encampment. Simukov’s (1933) ethnographic surveys across all of Mongolia documented most encampments between two to eight household, with a cluster around five or six.

economic relationships, the residential family group constitutes an institution only as a formative process rather than sets of rigid groups (Sneath 1999a:175).

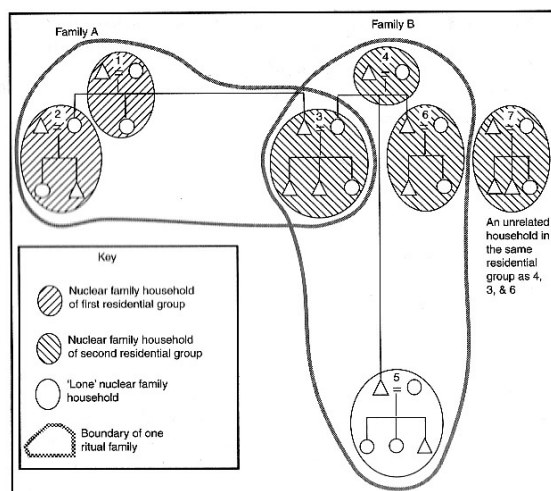


Fig.3.4 Family groups and kin networks (Sneath 1999a: 140)

The fluctuating residential family groups, though defined in kinship terms, are guided by economic demands. Certain times of the year, more households cluster together in order to pool labor for the increased demands of procuring pastoral products, such as cheese, yoghurt and sheered wool. In other instances, large herds, which cannot be collected in a single area for risk of overgrazing, are divided up through the practice of “leasing out” to separate residential groups. The presence of “ritually” defined groups that congregate in certain places (*nutga*) for particular social reasons, however, demonstrate the coexistence of identities and socio-political networks that might be open to (re)interpretation between and at gatherings. These distinctions are the sort that were manipulatable in the realm of power politics, and present the spheres of interest for the present study of steppe politics.

The regions of eastern Inner Asia are here collectively referred to as “the steppes,” but we should not consider it a geographically unchanging region. The

occurrence of numerous micro-regions (Frachetti 2008) remind us of the extensive environmental and economic variability which Inner Asian states such as the Xiongnu surely capitalized upon in the creation and maintenance of empires centered around the steppes. I have spent the above discussion clarifying the varied nature of mobile and pastoral societies, but do not wish to ignore the potential for and presence of agricultural communities in certain areas of Inner Asia, including some of the steppe regions (Di Cosmo 1994; Honeychurch and Amartuvshin 2007). Though mobile habitation patterns and pastoral strategies appear to have been the overwhelming foundation of the steppe societies and economies, neither of these were inherently hindrances to political cohesion or economic stability. I will return to these geographic, economic, and social particularities of the steppes of eastern Inner Asia in the forming of political institutions, but first turn to the models of political structure from which we might draw concepts to analyze the case study of the Xiongnu empire.

Delineating Imperial Entities

Notions of political entities, empires or otherwise, should serve as heuristic tools rather than categories for comparisons of social-evolutionary complexity (Goldstone and Haldon 2009: 5). I have stated that I do not wish to construct my analyses around a classificatory discussion of whether or not the Xiongnu polity was an “empire.” I do, however, wish to bring together different attempts to define empires, since they may collectively serve to construct a paradigm of research concepts related to large political entities. For these reasons, and others which I will now address, I chose to adopt the word “empire” as a suitable term, and not categorical type, to refer to the Xiongnu polity.

Flannery (1999) advocates studies of the “creation” of polities by agents in society rather than the systematic “evolution” of polities from one level of complexity to the next. The latter implies a systematic progression or trajectory while the former emphasizes active roles of political agents, not just in the moments, or ephemera (Braudel 1949), of “creation” but in the changes that occurred during the life of the polity. It is precisely the changes that occur within the life of a polity, rather than simply its origins, that I wish to address. The sentiment in opposition to functional developments schemes is echoed in recent arguments against classification of societies according to categories of social evolution. Sneath (2007) argues against the social evolutionary models associated with distinctions of tribe or tribal confederacy. These present dichotomies of kin-based non-state versus bureaucratic state societies, divisions in which steppe societies occupy the former category. He instead emphasizes a substantive tradition of aristocratic orders and principles of descent in steppe societies that form the basis of states. In this model of state formation, the majority of power and operations remain at the local level independent of a central authority, allowing for the existence of a “headless state.” Sneath does not argue that Inner Asian states necessarily were “headless” in nature, but that such headless states occurred quite often, and their occurrence informs us of the political base upon which states that *do* grow heads develop. The polities which rose under charismatic leaders and engaged in expansive conquests indubitably bore heads and established dynastic regimes in Inner Asia.

Many of the concepts of Inner Asian states have classified them as emerging supra-tribal networks couched in social evolutionary trajectories (cf. Kradin 2002, 2003). Di Cosmo (2002: 184-5) argues that the Xiongnu polity, though not a tribe, was *tribal* in

nature – “a state that was structured like a tribe in terms of hierarchies and access to power.” Scholars have for several decades called for an abandonment of the label *tribe* (Fried 1975; Sneath 2007) in discussions of states for all its inherent assumptions of the preeminence of kinship in socio-political networks. However, Parkinson (2002) rightfully argues against complete abandonment of the concept of “tribe” in descriptions of sociopolitical entities. The concept of tribe is not without use, though perhaps not applicable in the traditional socio-evolutionary sense as a term to label the Xiongnu entity.¹¹ I chose to avert the use of this term insofar as it applies to the branding of the large political entities which spanned vast regions of eastern Inner Asia as less formidable entities than states.

Smith (2003) further argues that the category of *state*, from traditional social evolutionary trajectories, positions all political actions within universal structures of power. The chief contention here is that studies should focus more on political strategies than political categories. There may often be a “misplaced concreteness” for the categories of state and empire in the process of evaluating a checklist of properties to determine whether the society in question qualifies (Morrison 2001: 4-5). There seems to be a recent consensus on the need to address not *what* these political entities were but on their practices and *how* they behaved (Morrison 2001; A.Smith 2003; M.Smith 2001). As such, I will not focus on the conventional determination of whether steppe polities, in general or on a case by case basis, qualify as one of the distinct categories of tribal confederacy, state, or empire. The rubric of empire and the associated models, however,

¹¹ Yoffee (1993) places the notions of tribes, chiefdoms and states in branching alternate trajectories rather than along a ladder of social evolution. This perhaps provides an opportunity to utilize these concepts without asserting one as more or less “complex” than another neighboring or preceding entity.

contain numerous divisions and elements which may be broadly addressed in the characterization and explanation of strategies observed in large steppe polities.

Empires, not surprisingly, have been set along spectrums of degrees of control and integration, and steppes empires have without fail been placed at the lower end of the spectrums. The most frequent dichotomy, which relies chiefly on the Old World empires of the Middle East and the Mediterranean, compares *hegemonic* empires of loose military control to *territorial* empires of more structured political control (Mann 1986; Santley and Alexander 1992). Such classifications pose hegemonic empires as lacking a unified political system and relying on compulsory cooperation enforced through strong military force. The opposing category of territorial empires instead relies on a class culture and formalized bureaucracy to rule directly over vast territories with a single empire-wide ruling class.

In his notion of degrees of effective sovereignty, Doyle (1986: 40) characterizes hegemony as control over only the external policies of constituent entities. In accordance with this notion is Bedford's (2009) dichotomy of clients and provinces in the Neo-Assyrian empire. Hegemonic rule was managed through indirect agents, or *clients*, and over time the territories ruled through the institution of clientship were transformed into provinces under direct control of the Assyrian élite. In theory, these peripheral client entities would have retained a degree of autonomy as well as a degree of alienation or "foreignness" from the ruling entity (Morris 2009). This returns us to the issue of diversity mentioned for geography and economy, and outlined above for the greater area of eastern Inner Asia. Imperial entities tended to rule over large regions of diverse

economies, cultures, and client polities, and were thus organized in a particular manner to handle such diversity (Schreiber 2001: 71).

Broad definitions of empires outline political entities that synthesize cultural, ecological or political diversity, via a standard imperial network, for the channeling of resources from peripheral entities to benefit the ruling core (Alcock et al. 2001; Parker 2003). The key elements in this definition are diversity and a distinct core. Doyle (1986) characterizes discrepancies between the core and periphery, or ruling and ruled, as disparities in power. However, if we employ Smith's (2003) terms related to political control, then it is not simply a difference in power which sets apart the ruling core, but one of legitimacy as well which establishes their authority over constituent groups. Should the ideological grounds of legitimacy fail, certain subordinate groups may possess enough power to successfully challenge the core. The diversity of constituents often presents a beneficial variety of resources but the disparate groups must be consistently checked by the imperial ruling body to ensure control.

Characterizations of the core have often rested on metropolitan centers and their expansive networks of urban nodes (cf. Doyle 1986; Schreiber 2001; Smith 2003) and thus come under criticism for adherences to territorially bounded world systems models. The core-periphery scheme, if mapped within the socio-political sphere rather than spatial realm, may continue to be applicable to the practices and institutions which delineate between those in power and those who remain subordinate. A core sociopolitical group need not be spatially concentrated in order to be distinguishable. Among the many possible strategies of identity, the imperial ruling body could have drawn on proclaimed kinship ties consecrated with lineage names or social ranks, proscribed use of

accoutrements of power, or restricted participation in events and ceremonies. I will revisit the more material issues in chapter five's discussion of the material evidence of power politics.

Within a paradigm of empires, core ruling entities are organized around the garnering of control and authority over numerous and different geographic, cultural and political entities despite their "foreignness." This projected sovereignty is achieved through a variety of practices and institutions, though often beginning with an indirect form of client rule which depends upon local rulers and leaves the local social customs and cultural traditions intact. The imperial core often pursues strategies of extending and intensifying rule over peripheral units by closing the gap of alienation (Morris 2009) and providing for cohesion among the core imperial and local élites (Bedford 2009). While many investigations into empires attend to state formation, this is rarely a momentary event, even though historical narratives may narrate them as such. Archaeological evidence over greater spans of time as well as considerations of the historical records beyond momentary events aid in the study of how these large political entities not only formed but developed. Imperial rulers and agents responded to changing conditions and crises in struggles with exterior entities as well as between various constituents within the empire (Goldstone and Haldon 2009). In the subsequent historical and archaeological discussions, I will address challenges to the authority of the ruling group(s) and pressure against cohesion of the empire from the inside and out.

Chapter Four:

HISTORICAL NARRATIVES OF THE XIONGNU EMPIRE

單于遺漢書曰：天所立匈奴大單于敬問皇帝無恙...以天之福，吏卒良，馬彊力，以夷滅月氏，盡斬殺降下之。定樓蘭、烏孫、呼揭及其旁二十六國，皆以為匈奴。諸引弓之民，并為一家。北州已定，願寢兵休士卒養馬。

The chanyu dispatched to the Han a letter saying “The Great Xiongnu Chanyu whom Heaven has established respectfully inquires whether the August Emperor is without ailment... . With the blessings of Heaven, the fine quality of officials and soldiers, and the strength of horses, [we] have wiped out the Yuezhi, completely cutting them down and killing them. [We have] stabilized the Loulan, Wusun, Hujie and the twenty six kingdoms at our side, and all are considered Xiongnu. All those who draw the bow are together now as one house. With the Northern Regions having been stabilized [we] wish to put down [our] weapons, let [our] soldiers rest, and feed [our] horses.” [Shiji 110: 2896]

In 176 BC, after three decades of campaigns and diplomacy, the founding leader of an Inner Asian conquest polity sent a declaration to the Han Chinese emperor proclaiming the supremacy of the Xiongnu over all the northern steppes. However, the rise of nomadic power in East Asia began long before this point (Di Cosmo 2002) as did the concept of a unifying steppe identity (Shelach 2005). Most scholars accept the date of 209 BC, when the leader Modun冒頓 rose to the position of supreme *chanyu*單于 ruler among his constituents, as the beginning date of the Xiongnu empire, even though his declaration of sole supremacy did not occur until much later.¹² For the purposes of this study it is sufficient to generally consider the turn of the late 3rd to early 2nd century BC as the beginning of the Xiongnu empire, and perhaps permissible to accept 209 BC as the starting date of the Xiongnu conquest state established by Modun.

Chronology provides as much of the critical foundation for historical studies as it does for archaeological investigations, and in the present chapter I will outline a

¹² This is a curious difference from the accepted date for the first Chinese empire of Qin 秦 which takes the year of official declaration of sole supremacy, 221 BC, as the beginning date, rather than 247 BC, the year of the ascension of the King of Qin, named Zheng, who eventually became the First Qin Emperor (Qin Shi Huangdi 秦始皇帝), or any other earlier date. Large polities such as empires often have particular moments when they are openly declared, though the real foundations begin before such declarations.

chronology of historical events relating to the Xiongnu narrated in the Chinese records. A basic chronology of the Xiongnu polity documented by the Chinese historians provides a basis, by defining the historical phenomenon in time and space through a collection of written records, for investigating the political strategies of the empire. Several scholarly summaries exist for the social, political, and economic aspects of the steppe groups of the late first millennium BC to early first millennium AD (de Crespigny 1984; Di Cosmo 1999a, 2002; Psarras 2003, 2004; Yü 1986, to name a few), but the following summary will proceed through the historical narratives with consideration for the questions posed at the beginning of this dissertation for the analysis of the textual and material evidence for political power in the steppes.

Many historians describe the Xiongnu polity as proceeding through two stages: appearing on the Inner Asian stage with an almost immediate dominant age of ultimate hegemony, even over the Chinese empire to the south, and then, after a series of wars with the Chinese, entering into a downward spiral from which they never fully recovered. Full considerations of events and actors, and the varied natures of the narrations of these periods, however, paint a more complex picture of the steppe polity with varied phases of strength and weakness. Just as Di Cosmo (1999b) argues for crisis as the impetus for state formation, so would I consider crises well after the founding of the state to provide a pivotal point either of failure to meet the demands and immediate downfall or of significant political change (Goldstone and Haldon 2009). Through the following narrative, I propose two discernible periods, separated by a cataclysmic interim, each with their own series of developments and equally significant in their assertion of Xiongnu power over the steppes and surrounding territories.

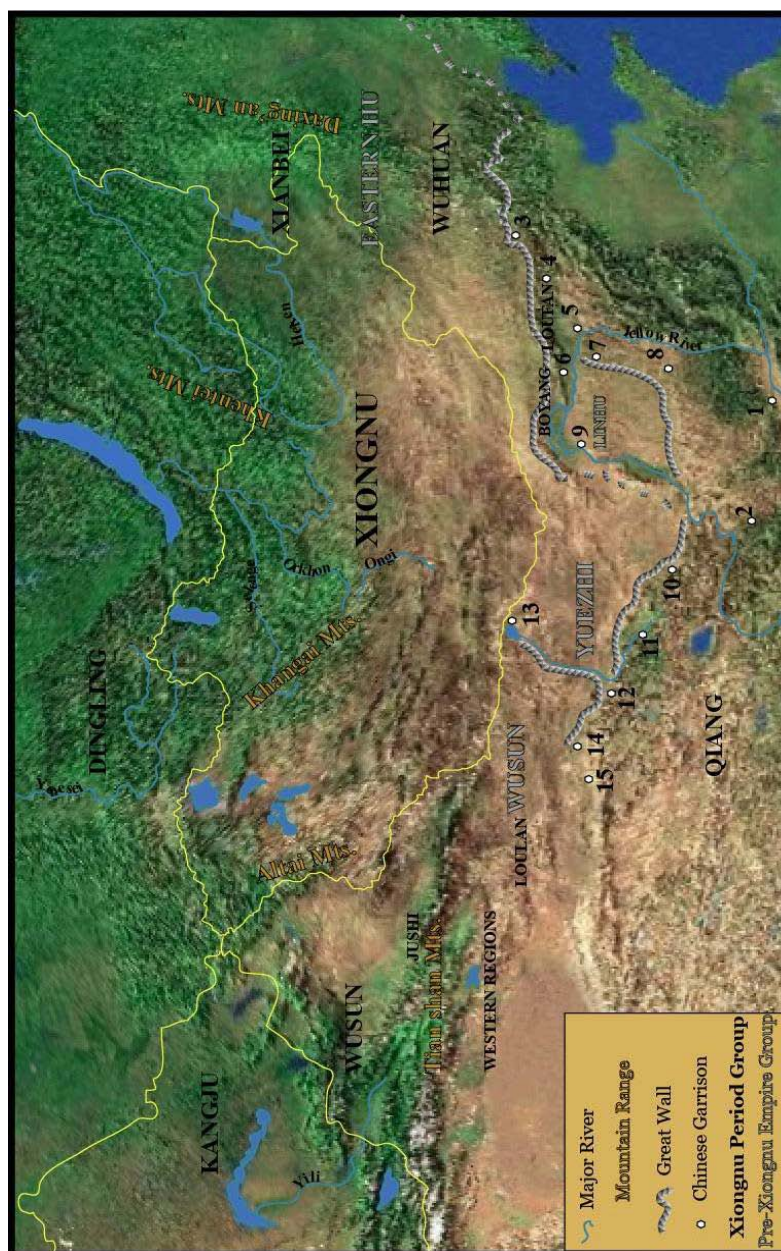


Fig. 4.1 Historical Map of The Iron Age Steppes

- 1 Chang'an
- 2 Longxi
- 3 Shanggu
- 4 Dai
- 5 Yunzhong
- 6 Jiuyuan, Wuyuan
- 7 Xihe (West of the River)
- 8 Shang (jun)
- 9 Shuofang
- 10 Wuwei
- 11 Zhangye

- 12 Jiuquan
- 13 Jiuyuan
- 14 Yumen
- 15 Dunhuang

The Early Xiongnu (209 – 58 BC) 早匈奴

Di Cosmo (2002: 174-8) characterizes the initial rise of the Xiongnu empire as occurring in three phases or “acts.” The expansion of the Chinese kingdoms had been placing pressure on the northern groups for several centuries, but the extensive invasion of the new Qin empire over large portions of steppe lands and the subsequent withdrawal of the northerners [*Shiji* 110: 2886-7] created a sudden significant imbalance and crisis in the first phase. The Chinese were admittedly not the only pressing force. Tribes to the east of the Xiongnu, known collectively as the Eastern Hu 東胡, as well as the Yuezhi 月氏 tribes in the Gansu region to the south were both cited as being more “powerful” and “prosperous” than the Xiongnu [*Shiji* 110: 2887]. These pressing groups may have contributed similarly to the political and economic crisis of the late 3rd century BC.

The second act was the tale of patricide of the Xiongnu ruler Touman 頭曼 by his son Modun, in which the new ruler violently seized power with his own personal militia. He had his father killed by this loyal personal guard, who also quickly executed his stepmother(s), younger brother(s) and all those great chiefs who would not listen or follow, and established himself as the supra-tribal leader *chanyu* [*Shiji* 110: 2888]. Di Cosmo (1999b, 2002) cites this sacred investment in a supreme ruler as a strategy equivalent to Salzman’s (1980) concept of an “ideology in reserve” employed in critical circumstances.¹³ The essential undertaking to the establishment of a secure polity and not

¹³ The use of the title *chanyu* for Modun’s father Touman implies that this position had existed before these crises, and was thus, in the case of the Xiongnu, not a title “in reserve” but already in use. What may have differed, if we are to follow the concept of the “ideology in reserve” – though there is no indication of this – is the *nature* of investment. The title of “magnificent” leader *chanyu* could have been reused from before, but with an added sacred character to the establishment. If it were to have had such a character, it must have come after Modun’s self declaration, with further accolades from approving noble chiefs, or been an

the single rule of an individual was the establishment of a royal lineage in firm control so that the polity would not collapse upon the death of the founder (Di Cosmo 2002: 184).¹⁴

There is no direct description of the establishment of a new line of rulers, though the clear strength of Modun's line and the Luandi clan remained uncontested during the periods of power and resilience of the Xiongnu polity.

東胡初輕冒頓，不為備。及冒頓以兵至，擊，大破滅東胡王，而虜其民人及畜產。既歸，西擊走月氏，南并樓煩、白羊河南王。(侵燕代)悉復收秦所使蒙恬所奪匈奴地者，與漢關故河南塞，至朝那、膚施，遂侵燕、代。是時漢兵與項羽相距，中國罷於兵革，以故冒頓得自彊，控弦之士三十餘萬。

The Eastern Hu in the beginning made light of Modun, and were not prepared [for him]. So Modun arrived with troops, attacked, and inflicted great damage and wiped out the Eastern Hu king, and thus captured his people as well as livestock. [He] immediately returned, [then] went west and attacked and routed the Yuezhi, and went south bringing together the Loufan and Boyang kings south of the River [under his control]. [He] entirely took back the land which Qin had sent Meng Tian to take from the Xiongnu by force, by [meeting up] with the Han passes and the previous garrisons south of the River, reaching Chaona and Fushi, and then invading Yan and Dai. At this time, the Han troops were at opposition with Xiang Yu, the Central States were at a standstill with their troops in upheaval,¹⁵ and thus Modun was able to strengthen himself, [obtaining] over 300,000 soldiers that drew a bow. [*Shiji* 110: 2889-90]

The third act in creating the empire was the establishment of a detailed governing structure and administrative ranks for the ruling members, which enabled the incorporation and management of large amounts of new territories and people. Through the processes of militarization and centralization, the Xiongnu state of Modun was able to mobilize and meet the demands brought on by the sudden crises (Di Cosmo 2002: 181-6).

assertion all his own. In either case, his initial installment was not the collective decision of the tribal chiefs drawing on an ideal “in reserve” for a sacredly invested supreme leader, it was a usurpation and self promotion. The creation of sacral investiture in a supreme leader was not a single enactment but a process with many aspects and phases (Di Cosmo 2002: 183), especially in the case of Modun of the Xiongnu.

¹⁴ For this reason, de Crespigny (1984: 332-44) characterizes the late second century AD Xianbei 鮮卑 leader Tanshihuai 檀石槐 as more of a “pirate king” than a dynastic founder, taking advantage of the vacuum left behind after the end of Xiongnu hegemony. He failed to secure the legitimacy of a royal lineage and did not establish any centralized structure similar to the Xiongnu, leaving his territorial expansions more of a “personal achievement” than the establishment of a Xianbei empire.

¹⁵ This refers to the civil war following the overthrow of the Qin empire. In the later years of the civil war, the upheaval boiled down to a struggle between Xiang Yu, the King of Chu, and Liu Bang, the King of Han, who eventually won in 202 BC and founded the Han Dynasty.

After the initial seizure of power and campaigning, Modun found approval from the other tribal leaders through his ability to manage the startling crises that his father, Touman, and others were unable to manage as well as expand power beyond the previous extent of Xiongnu control.

後北服渾庾、屈射、丁零、鬲昆、薪述之國。於是匈奴貴人大臣皆服，以冒頓單于為賢。
 Afterward [he] went north and [forced into] submission the states of Hunyu, Qushi, Dingling, Gekun, and Xin'er. At that time the Xiongnu nobles and great chiefs all submitted, considering Modun chanyu to be worthy. [SJ 110: 2893]

By 198 BC, the newly formed Xiongnu polity was able to crush the forces of the young Han empire and demand tribute from the Chinese court for several generations afterward. Following the defeat of the new Han emperor, Modun campaigned further west, completing the task of crushing the Yuezhi, where he had only succeeded in routing them before, and defeating the Loulan, Wusun and Hujie groups in the Gansu corridor and Western Regions. The lengthy reign of Modun (209-174 BC) no doubt played an integral part in the solidification and legitimization of the Xiongnu aristocratic clans, royal and subordinate lineages, and the sacred supreme ruler that reigned over the steppe empire. The seemingly sudden creation of this massive political entity was most likely not a creation out of nothing, but the reorganization of tribal hierarchies and tribal unities around a centralized political structure and military machine (Di Cosmo 2002: 187).

*Structure of the Imperial Hierarchy*¹⁶

The pinnacle of the new centralized, hierarchical governing structure for the empire was the sacred supreme ruler of the Xiongnu, who was addressed as Chengli Gutu Chanyu: *chengli* (赛犁) meaning “Heaven,” *gutu* (孤塗) “son,” and *chanyu* (單于) “magnificence” [HS 94A: 3751].¹⁷ There is a clear notion that he was legitimized by the grace of Heaven, and perhaps even a borrowing of the concept of the Son of Heaven (*tianzi*天子) from the Chinese tradition of rulership. In the case of the Inner Asian state, however, there was a tradition of electing such a leader via the collective approval of his establishment (Di Cosmo 1999b). Those rulers who “established themselves chanyu” (自立為單于) were not only in conflict with the wishes of their deceased predecessors but often of the combined approvals of the majority of the noble tribal leaders as well. The collective, and more accepted, decisions are reflected in the repeated occurrences of

¹⁶ The main descriptions of the political hierarchies are provided in parallel paragraphs in the *Shiji* [110: 2890-1] and *Han shu* [94A: 3751]. References are provided below for information that occurs in only one of these passages and not the other, or for details that lie outside these summary paragraphs. De Crespigny (1984: 176 ff.) reviews the political structure of the Xiongnu by referring to the hierarchy described in the *Hou Han shu*. This chapter pertains specifically to the Southern Xiongnu of northern China and, even though it was certainly based upon the steppe Xiongnu precedent, divisions and components such as the Four Horns and Six Horns 四角六角 may not reflect the form of hierarchy exactly as it was manifested in the steppe empire of the Xiongnu.

¹⁷ The meaning of *chengli* as “Heaven” accords with later versions of the word as well as the modern Mongolian word for “Heaven” *tengri*, but some conflicting assertions have been made for the term *gutu*. Kürsat-Ahlers (1996: 141) follows the majority of Turkic linguists and gives the meaning of the full title as “Shanyu with the charisma (kut) of Heaven,” but this differs from the meaning of “son” for *gutu* given in the second century AD Chinese text of the *Han shu*. Chen (2002: 309-10) adopts this Turkic *kut* or *qut* meaning of *gutu* in an attempt to argue against a purely Chinese origin of steppe practices of sacral kingship. Taking *kut* to mean Heaven’s “favor” or “fortune,” he interprets *chengli gutu* as “Heaven’s gift” rather than “Heaven’s son.” He further argues against an adoption of the Son of Heaven (*Tian zi*天子) Chinese title by citing the use of the title King of Heaven (*Tian wang*天王) by barbarian rulers who established conquest dynasties over Chinese territory in the north after the fall of the Han empire. One may certainly argue against a copying of the Chinese traditions for the sacral investiture used by the Xiongnu rulers, but contradictory linguistic parallels and the explicit meaning of “son” for *gutu* given in the original Han period text call into question the validity of a meaning equivalent to the Turkic *kut*.

calling together the various great chiefs at the death of a chanyu and the result of “the Xiongnu thus establishing” (匈奴乃立) the new chanyu.

The state was organized around a single royal lineage and its close constituent lineages which collectively held restricted rights to the supreme positions of governing and control. Di Cosmo (2002: 184-5) thus purports the state was *tribal* not because it was controlled by tribal entities but that it resembled a tribe in its hierarchy of lineages and access to power. The family name (*xing* 姓) of the royal lineage (*shi* 氏) of the chanyu was Luandi 攣鞮,¹⁸ and the constituent “noble stock” (*guizhong* 貴種) consisted of a handful of lineages – Huyan 呼衍, Lan 蘭, and later Xubu 須卜. These secondary lineages also served as consort lineages to the royal line and retained a certain degree of regional heritage: Huyan from the “Left” or east, and Lan and Xubu from the “Right” or west.¹⁹ Together these groups “constituted the clans of [significant] name in the state” (為國中名族) [*Hou Han shu* 89: 2944-5]. By the broad use of aristocratic lineage names to denote large groups of people, it may be that these larger clans took as their collective name the family name of the dominant lineage. Here, I adopt the definitions of *lineage* and *clan* as utilized for the Chinese terms *shi* 氏 and *zu* 族 by Falkenhausen (2006: 23),²⁰ and taken from the definitions outlined by Roger Keesing (1976: 251):

¹⁸ This was later written as Xulianti 虛連題 [HHS 89: 2945], though this is probably only a difference in transliteration.

¹⁹ The *Hou Han shu* also lists a fourth clan of Qiulin 丘林, though gives no regional heritage or background to it. As this text, compiled well after the fall of the Han and Xiongnu dynasties, concerns the Southern Xiongnu entity formed in the mid first century AD, the Qiulin may be a clan related only to later political developments. It is nonetheless difficult to determine.

²⁰ One must bear in mind that these are Chinese terms being used to describe the nomadic society to their north, and thus face difficulties in describing the kinship systems of a different society. In the case of the

A *lineage* is a descent group consisting of people patrilineally or matrilineally descended from a known ancestor through a series of links they can trace...[a larger descent group] who believe they are descended from a common ancestor but do not know the actual connections is called a *clan*.

Wittfogel and Feng (1949: 206-207) purport that the Xiongnu had family (姓) clan designations only for the imperial aristocracy, as a way to “restrict the privileges of clanship...and ancestral worship as the exclusive practice.” However, this speculation finds evidence to the contrary in the appearance of additional clan names, discussed in detail below, beyond those listed in the description of the Xiongnu hierarchy. These additional names strewn throughout the narratives attest to the presence of numerous other clans with notable names. This, then, raises the question of why only three lineages are described as constituting the “noble stock.” The occurrence of additional names suggests that the four clans outlined above were not extraordinary in their practices of clanship or ancestral worship, nor in their aristocratic nature. Perhaps their declaration as the “state clans” provides the true distinction, asserting them as elevated above all other noble lineages and equated with the ultimate governing power of the state.

Brutal disputes and bloody succession wars were usually avoided by restricting the position of the supreme ruler to the royal lineage, and in most cases the sons and brothers of the reigning chanyu [Fig. 4.2]. While the historical narratives tell of court intrigues surrounding the dubious replacement of one possible son or brother for another, it was the claim of leaders outside the royal lineage which brought a devastating crisis to the fore a century and half after the rise of the founding chanyu Modun. While there clearly existed scores of aristocratic clans who held great power throughout the Xiongnu

narratives about the northern nomads, there seems to be a fluid use of the term *shi* to denote either a specific lineage or the greater clan over which it dominates.

territories, the main royal and three constituent lineages may be understood as the core imperial clans. The main description of the political structure implies these clans as filling the ranks of the top positions of the imperial hierarchy. Their placement in these uppermost ranks appears to have been the exclusive right of the chanyu.

置左右賢王，左右谷蠡王，左右大將，左右大都尉，左右大當戶，左右骨都侯... 自如左右賢王以下至當戶，大者萬騎，小者數千，凡二十四長，立號曰「萬騎」。諸大臣皆世官。

[The chanyu] installed the Left and Right Wise Kings, the Left and Right Luli Kings, the Left and Right Grand Generals, the Left and Right Grand Commandants, the Left and Right Grand Household Administrators, and the Left and Right Gudu Marquises... From the Left and Right Wise Kings to the Left and Right Household Administrators, the greater ones had 10,000 cavalry and the lesser ones had several thousand cavalry. Altogether there were twenty-four chiefs [of these higher ranks] and they were established with the titles of “Ten Thousand Cavalry.” The various great chiefs were all hereditary offices. [Shiji 110: 2890]

These highest of positions were hereditary offices in so far as they remained, in principle, within the same lineages, though there are countless examples of new chanyus re-appointing the positions of the high kings. The highest of these positions was the Wise King of the Left,²¹ who was most often the heir apparent, and this position was thus usually reappointed with the accession of a new chanyu. The terms here and throughout the Chinese records utilize Chinese terms of office to describe the ranks of the steppe élite. I have usually preserved the original translations, such as “king” and “marquis,” rather than inventing my own set of distinctions. The collective term for all of these leaders of the upper echelon is given as “great ministers” (*da chen* 大臣), but we may think of them less as ministers in a bureaucratic fashion as they were powerful leaders of the steppe aristocracy, or “great chiefs.” These were the appointees of the chanyu but held great power over their own constituents, whom they were entitled to appoint.

²¹ The Xiongnu word for “wise” or “worthy” (in Chinese, *xian* 賢) was *tuqi* 屠耆, and so the records tell us that the heir apparent was often known as the Tuqi King of the Left [Shiji 110: 2890].

諸二十四長亦各自置千長、百長、什長、裨小王、相、(封)[將]、都尉、當戶、且渠之屬。
 The various twenty-four chiefs also each themselves appointed [their] Thousand Chiefs, Hundred Chiefs, Ten Chiefs, subordinate lesser kings, ministers, generals, commandants, household administrators, *juqu* and so on. [*Shiji* 110: 2891]

We may furthermore consider the high kings and other elevated dignitaries, not as overlords of kingdoms in the Medieval European sense, but in the more general sense of the word – high members of elite society who held control over relatively independent and definable territories (Di Cosmo 2002: 177).

各有分地，逐水草移徙。而左右賢王、左右谷蠡王最為大(國)
 Each had their [own] territory [within which] to follow grass and water and move in migration. The Left and Right Wise Kings and the Left and Right Luli Kings had the largest kingdoms [*Shiji* 110: 2891]

This clear concept of territoriality describes appanages over which the tribal leaders exercised relatively independent rule (Di Cosmo 2002: 177). The pairing of the two phrases “each had their own territory” and “follow grass and water and move in migration” implies that it was within these territories that the various tribal leaders, and their constituents by association, were able to migrate within their pastoral cycles. This may correlate to the delineation of migratory circuits and territorial tendencies, seen also in the medieval Eastern Inner Asia when the tribal leaders also had “their own territory in which to live and to nomadize” (Drompp 1991: 105) and documented in Mongolia during the early twentieth century (Fernandez-Gimenez 1999, Simukov 1933).

The last group of dignitaries appointed by the chanyu was not among the twenty-four great chiefs nor were they drawn from the restricted aristocratic clans. The Gudu Marquises of the Left and Right were ministers meant to assist in governing and their ranks were filled from “different families” (*yixing* 異姓), or of lineages not of the imperial aristocratic clans. There is no mention of appanages or a host of subordinates for

them, and since their specifically mentioned function was to assist in governing, we can only assume that these dignitaries stayed close to the chanyu. They, more than the other chanyu appointed lords, depended greatly on their personal connection to the ruler who had put them and their direct families into positions of power.

Drompp (1991) recognizes the fluidity of the power structures of traditional nomadic polities in his investigation of the early Türks. He maintains the impossibility of imposing a rigid model of the governing bodies for the entire periods of such empires, while also asserting that it is this flexibility which allows for, and often results in, political changes suited to changing political circumstances. More titles could have been added to the hierarchy as time progressed, though an overload of the uppermost echelon would have resulted in disastrous consequences for the political structure. It is the subtle changes in the ranks and relationships of the imperial hierarchy over time that I wish to consider in my overview of the historical narratives.

In the example of the Türk empires, titles of subordinate qağan were often given to placate possible competitive claimants to the position of supreme qağan ruler (Drompp 1991). Not all the supreme qağans appointed subordinate qağans, though, and neither was the supreme ruler always selected from the ranks of the subordinate qağans. All of the subordinate qağans were, however, sons of supreme qağans. While the heir apparent was most often appointed to the position of the Wise King of the Left in the Xiongnu empire, the identity of such an heir was not fixed. It could be a son, and not necessarily the eldest, of the chanyu, or a younger brother. Since there were usually a collection of sons and younger brothers, the assortment of high positions of Wise (Tuqi) kings, Luli kings and the like could have, and often did, similarly serve to placate powerful claimants and avoid

succession struggles that might resemble a Celtic “bloody tanistry” (Fletcher 1980, cited in Di Cosmo 2002: 185).

Beneath this superstructure of the Türk ruling élite have been documented other confederate tribes that retained native ruling clans, though later were intruded upon with members of central administration (Golden 1992: 142-9). Sneath (2007) maintains that this base of local groups and the actions of state power of the Inner Asian state existed with or without the uppermost echelon to govern it, often resulting in what he terms the “headless state.” Sneath is not arguing that the Inner Asian states necessarily were “headless” in nature, but that such headless states occurred quite often, and their occurrence informs us of the political base from which states do grow heads and begin to show a clear distinction between the governing “head” and the governed “body.”

“Named Kings” and the Body of the Empire

The broad base of the Xiongnu empire, like that of the Türkic and other Inner Asian states, was the numerous tribute-paying member populations and their local leaders. While no detailed outlines or mapping of these constituent entities appear in the historical records as there was for the uppermost echelon, references nevertheless occur of these confederate local leaders and subject territories throughout the narratives, as well as hints toward their relationships with the governing imperial aristocracy. These local leaders are mentioned as the “Xiongnu kings” 匈奴王, the “Xiongnu named kings” 匈奴名王, “various kings” 諸王, “lesser subordinate kings” 小裨王, “boundary kings” 邊王, and “frontier entrenchment kings” 甌脫王, the latter of whom the Han had brought over to

their side during the campaigns of the early first century BC. The boundary and frontier kings may relate to the phenomenon of peripheral leaders and territories incorporated during extensive conquests, who undoubtedly switched allegiances often between the Xiongnu and the other neighboring powers such as the Han and the Wusun. The term “various kings” appears to be applied to the imperial kings outlined above as well as those other kings outside of the upper echelon, and the broad attribution of Xiongnu kings may apply to the leaders of the core Xiongnu territories or more simply all of those leaders who identified themselves as being part of the Xiongnu polity.

The term “named kings” (*ming wang* 名王) perhaps hints at a custom of retaining the names of territories, clans, or dignified titles, though the origin and meaning of each name is not always clear and not necessarily names of the same derivation. The term appears in the *Han shu* and not the *Shiji*, and even then only once in regard to the Chinese nobles in a commentator’s note for explanatory purposes, not as a term in itself.²² All uses of this term in the original text pertain to the Xiongnu, and the first mention of it in the *Han shu*, describing a tribute mission to the Han court of Emperor Xuan, bears a note explaining the term.

匈奴單于遣名王奉獻，[一] 賀正月，始和親。

[一] ...名王者，謂有大名，以別諸小王也。

The Xiongnu chanyu dispatched named kings to present tribute ^[1] in celebration of the First Month and to begin a *heqin* [agreement]. [*Han shu* 8: 262]

^[1] ... Named kings are [those] so called who have great names, and are different from the various small kings.

²² The first mention in the *Han shu* of “various marquises and kings” (*zhu hou wang* 諸侯王) of the Han is given a note to explain these as “named kings.”

These “named kings” therefore stood in contrast to other local chiefs who did not retain significant enough names, whatever those names might be. The parallel narrative in the first Xiongnu chapter of the *Han shu* gives the names of the actors in this occasion, thus providing an example of a named king.

握衍胸鞮單于立，復修和親，遣弟伊酋若王勝之入漢獻見。

When Woyanqudi chanyu was established [he] again requested a *heqin* [agreement], dispatching [his] younger brother the Yicouruo King Shengzhi to enter the Han and pay tribute and gain audience. [HS 94A: 3789]

The Yicouruo King, despite his relation to the chanyu, was not among the core twenty four great chiefs whom the chanyus appointed and over whom they retained institutionalized control.²³ He nevertheless retains a close personal, and familial, connection to the new chanyu, and is in this manner a king of significance. Several mentions of “named kings” as a category occur alongside consorts (*yanzhi* 閼氏), princesses (*juci* 居次), nobles (*guiren* 貴人), and high dignitaries [*Han shu* 3004, 3012, 3014, 3019, 3786, 3813]. Though it is difficult to determine whether such general mentions denote the twenty-four great chiefs or other kingly chiefs, the term undoubtedly includes these other powerful leaders.

Some names of the kings represent dignified titles. The king name of Gou 句 [Shiji 111: 2932n.11] refers to a Xiongnu title nomenclature (*hao* 號), whose meaning remains unknown. Other names denote clans or lineages. One of the kings mentioned is

²³ Lengthy names in the texts, such as the above mentioned Yicouruo King Shengzhi, have helped to indicate that the characters before the word “king” are related to the title, and those characters after the word “king” are the given names of these leaders. For example: Gou King Gaobushi 句王高不識, Ti King Dulihuci 題王都犁胡次, and Hesu King Xingweiyang 郝宿王刑未央. The titles of these kings could derive from a place name or clan/lineage name, though such designations are often synonymous, and to try to determine which of the two it might be would most likely lead to futile tautological discussions.

the Huyan King 呼衍王, whose daughters were the most primary consorts of Huhanye 呼韓邪 chanyu [*Han shu* 94B: 3806]. Though the select imperial clans, such as the Huyan, had access to highest positions, they also appeared to retain their own rulership. The king name of Zhelan 折蘭 is described as a family name (*xing* 姓) of the Xiongnu, as well as the name of a state (*guo* 國) [*Shiji* 110: 2930 n.7]. Without engaging in a tautological line of discussion on the exact origins of these names, they may simply be understood as interchangeable between the names of territories, clans, and their regional rulers labeled “kings” in the Chinese accounts.

In the accounts of the original conquests by Modun we can already see mentions of these subjugated “states” or “kingdoms” and their rulers, the “kings.” The king of the Eastern Hu 東胡 is “destroyed,” while his people and animals are seized, and the Loufan 樓煩 and Boyang 白羊 kings in the vicinity of the northern bend in the Yellow River are “brought together” under the control of the Xiongnu. These tribal leaders and their territories would have constituted significant and strategic inclusions for the growing conquest state, and the extravagant wealth found in the élite burials of the Ordos region during the late third to early second century BC, such as Xigoupan 西溝畔, Aluchaideng 阿魯柴登, and Taohongbala, attest to the power of these local leaders (Wu’en 2007: 322-56).

Some ruling lineages appear to have been wiped out in the process of conquest. We are told that the king(s) of the Eastern Hu was wiped out and his people and livestock were taken. Other conquered tribes were not only allowed to continue, but were acknowledged as the rightful rulers of their own territories, retaining their clan names in

their king titles through subsequent generations. Well over a century after the subjugation of the Loufan and Boyang kings, these territories are encountered, still retaining kings with their original names, during the Han campaigns northward against the Xiongnu [*Shiji* 111: 2923]. The Hujie 呼揭, who were conquered in Modun's campaigns westward, also remained intact in the western portions of the Xiongnu empire, and a century and a half later their Hujie King played a critical role in the political upheaval of the mid first century BC [*Han shu* 94B: 3795]. The body of the state, and the local leaders of which it was comprised, appeared to thrive with the continuation of clan and regional names and often pronounced degrees of local power.

I return now to a more chronological progression and a reminder of Drompp's (1991) assertion regarding the fluidity of power structures and changes over time in political relationships for the steppe polities. The creation of the state under a supreme ruler, as opposed to other "headless states" which occurred in the steppes (Sneath 2007), clearly reorganized the tribal relationships into a hierarchy of privileges and power as a response to a crisis or compact series of crises (Di Cosmo 1999b). In considering the formation of these Inner Asian states and the socio-political changes that occurred in the process, we must also acknowledge the changes due to stress and tension which took place over the course of the existence of such a states as well as the pivotal periods of crisis and crisis intervention in the midst of the life of a state.

Xiongnu Hegemony

After a humiliating defeat by the new Xiongnu ruler Modun chanyu in 200 BC, the new Chinese ruler Han Emperor Gao 漢高帝,²⁴ who was at the head of the army which the Xiongnu surrounded in the dead of winter, accepted an equally humbling treaty in 198 BC of “joined familial connections,” or *heqin* 和親, with the Xiongnu rulership. The agreement centered around the symbolic action of sending a daughter of the Han emperor to become a legitimate wife of the Xiongnu chanyu – thus joining their royal families on a more even level than would otherwise be acceptable to the Chinese for interactions with a foreign entity – and was accompanied by yearly lavish gifts for the Xiongnu ruler of “silk thread and cloth, wine, and grain, each with their [proper] proportions” (絮繒酒米食物各有數) [*Shiji* 110: 2895]. The Xiongnu had secured an agreement which in name set the two political entities in proximal statuses, but in actuality placed the Chinese in a tributary relationship similar to microcosmic agreements that the Xiongnu had garnered with other surrounding states and tribes.

When either the Xiongnu or the Han rulership changed, there was often an attempt to renew the peaceable agreement. Thus, during the subsequent reign of Han Emperor Hui 漢惠帝 and Empress Lü 呂后, his domineering mother and the empress of the deceased Gao, Modun sent a letter to Empress Lü courting her to come heal the problem of being “alone and restless” which they both shared. The proposal for a renewal of the *heqin* agreement skirted the edge of subtlety in suggesting that the empress become his new wife. Her reply graciously declined the offer of marriage, but acknowledged the

²⁴ The first Han emperor is referred to both as the Gaodi and Gaozu – the Exalted Emperor and the High,

renewal of the agreement with a gift two imperial chariots and two horses [Han shu 94A: 3754-5].

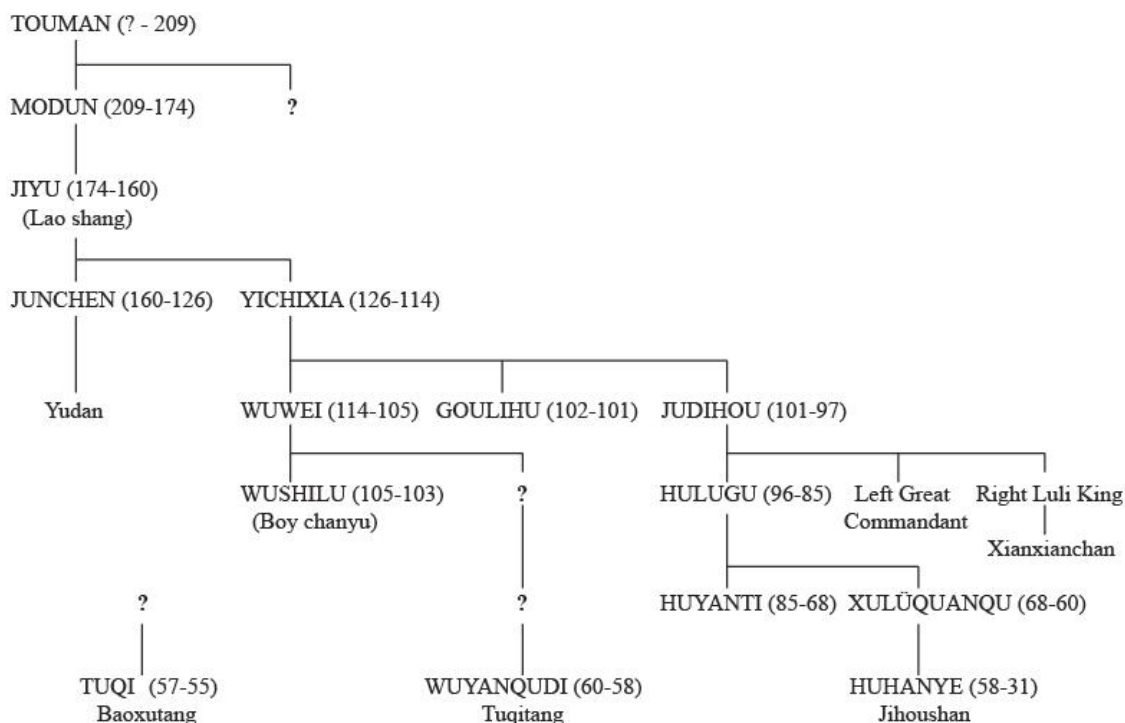


Fig. 4.2 Early Xiongnu Successions

In 174 BC, with the accession of the next chanyu ruler Jiyu 稽粥, referred to as “Venerable One” (*Lao Shang* 老上) by the Chinese, the Han Emperor Wen 漢文帝 sent a new bride for the new chanyu [Shiji 110: 2898]. Then in 162 BC, near the end of Jiyu’s reign, Emperor Wen again consented to the renewal of the *heqin* agreement with language that reaffirmed the fraternal relationship between the two rulers and reiterated the dual world order in which they were equal powers.

皇帝敬問匈奴大單于無恙。使當戶且(居)[渠]雕渠難、郎中韓遼遺朕馬二匹，已至，敬受。先帝制：長城以北，引弓之國，受命單于；長城以內，冠帶之室，朕亦制之。

The August Emperor respectfully inquires whether the Great Chanyu is without ailment. [You] have sent the Household Administrator, the Juqu Diaoquan and the Gentleman of the Interior Han Liao to present

Us with two horses, which have arrived, and [We] graciously accept. The previous Emperor set up [the agreement that] what is north of the Long Walls and the states of [those who] draw the bow shall receive the command of the Chanyu, and what is within the Long Walls and the households of [those who] wear the cap and belt, We shall govern them. [*Shiji* 110: 2902]

漢與匈奴鄰國之敵，匈奴處北地，寒，殺氣早降，故詔吏遺單于秫糲金帛絲絮佗物歲有數。Since Han and Xiongnu are neighboring states of equal status, and the Xiongnu reside in the northern territories [where] it is cold and the killing frosts fall early, [We] therefore order officials to offer the chanyu sorghum and leaven, gold, silk cloth, silk thread, raw silk and other goods each year in certain amounts. [*Shiji* 110: 2903]

Aside from the gracious language and concession to the renewal of the original terms and tribute, we may also see a reference to the use of the chanyu's lower level appointed officials: a Household Administrator and a Juqu official named Diaoqunan. Though the former was likely one of the Great Household Administrators who was from the imperial aristocracy while the latter was likely from a "different family," both probably retained a close personal relationship with the chanyu and were entrusted to lead a most important mission to the Chinese court in asking for the renewal of the *heqin*. Accompanying them on their mission was a Chinese official, most likely returning from a previous mission.²⁵

When the third chanyu, Junchen 軍臣, ascended to the position of chanyu in 160 BC, the *heqin* agreement was renewed. Then in 156 BC, one year after the new Han Emperor Jing 漢景帝 rose to power, he sent a mission to renew the *heqin*, providing a new Han princess and ensuring the opening of border markets [*Shiji* 110: 2904]. When the Han Emperor Wu 漢武帝 became the ruler of the Chinese empire in 140 BC, he also

²⁵ The title of Gentleman of the Interior (*lang zhong* 郎中) is a Chinese title, just as Han Liao 韓遼 is a Chinese name. Numerous Chinese and Xiongnu officials ventured north and south in the process of the diplomatic and tributary missions, though there were also many on both sides who defected to the other. We may assume that the Chinese man Han Liao was not a defector since he retained his Chinese title.

reaffirmed the *heqin* agreement with gifts and the opening of border markets. But five years later, intense debate opened at the Han court contending the futility of the *heqin* policy, and the Han hatched a plan to lure and capture the Xiongnu chanyu in a false defection of the Chinese border city of Mayi 馬邑. The plan failed, and war erupted between the two powers.

The true failure, however, lay in the *heqin* policy itself, and not in the manner that most of the contemporary Han scholars imagined. Di Cosmo (2002: 215-27) cites a conceptual misunderstanding on the part of the Han as the reason for the failure. The Han scholars argued over the reasons for the Xiongnu refusal to adhere to the agreement and the chanyu's constant breaking of the terms of peace. Modern scholars have turned over this diplomatic argument in favor of an economic line of reasoning, asserting theories of "trade" and "raid" as the impetuses for and sources of the problems with the *heqin* agreements (Jegchid and Symons 1989; Barfield 1989). Di Cosmo chooses to return to a more political discussion by emphasizing the differences in the governing structures of the two empires. In short, the Han misunderstood the nature of the chanyu's authority and assumed the same degree of sovereignty for the Xiongnu ruler over his claimed territories as their own emperor had in the Chinese realm. One of the more telling admissions to this comes almost a hundred years after the abandonment of the *heqin* strategy as outlined by the Han Emperor Gao, when the chanyu Huhanye 呼韓邪 proposed to relieve the Han of their frontier expenses and guard the border on their behalf (cited in Di Cosmo 2002: 226). The Chinese minister Hou Ying 侯應 advises the Han emperor otherwise, citing previous raiding violations of peace agreements and finally concluding with the rhetorical

question: “As for the situation of the chanyu, can [he] make certain his people do not violate the agreement?” (又況單于，能必其衆不犯約哉) [*Han shu* 94B: 3804].

There were in fact numerous occasions of raids at varying scales and launched by different local leaders, as well as swells of defectors to such a degree that it became a sore point in peace negotiations, all during the early reigns of Han and Xiongnu rulers while *heqin* agreements were attempting to ensure peace. The earlier letters to the Xiongnu bore an assumption that “what is north of the Long Walls and the states of [those who] draw the bow shall receive the command of the Chanyu” [*Shiji* 110: 2902], but the Xiongnu ruler was supreme, not absolute. His command was not equivalent to law as it was with the Han emperor, and showering the chanyu himself with gifts was not a reliable way to ensure harmony with all of the so-called frontier kings and their immediate subordinate populations.

A first century BC version of the famous “Three Models Five Baits” (*san biao wu er* 三表五餌) memorial, put forth in the second century BC to the Han emperor by Jia Yi 賈誼, in the initial years of the reign of Emperor Wen, opened with the comment:

臣為陛下建三表設五餌，以此與單于爭其民則下匈奴猶振槁也... (使)[令]匈奴大眾之信陛下也

[I], the vassal, for Your Majesty [propose to] build up three models and devise five baits, and use these alongside the chanyu’s contention with his people, thus causing the Xiongnu to subside as if arousing rotteness... Make the great multitudes of the Xiongnu come to trust in Your Majesty. [*Xin shu* 4.1:27]

This measure aimed to fan the fire of dissension amongst the various leaders beneath the Xiongnu chanyu – employing the Five Baits – and create a model benevolent ruler in the

Chinese emperor – through the Three Models – to whom the splintering elements of the Xiongnu people would flock.²⁶

The traditional assessment views the material baits as a means to “control the Xiongnu through Han superior culture” (Yü 1986: 388) or gifts bestowed so that “the Xiongnu should be softened and corrupted by an addiction to material comforts, and thus deprived of their martial qualities, to the relief of the Han empire” (Loewe 2000: 189). Di Cosmo (2002: 202) is correct in stating that Jia Yi did not see goods from China as “sugar-coated bullets” from a superior society. However, a thorough analysis of the details outlined within the concept²⁷, evidences that the baits were indeed meant to “dazzle and corrupt,” though not in the same acculturating manner that previous scholars have assumed. The corruptive effect would theoretically come not from the innate Chinese quality of the baits, but from their ability to ensnare the Xiongnu prey since they were similar to those things most cherished within the steppe society and from their direct distribution to the local leaders.

The Chinese were familiar with the role of exotica in élite power politics, and the Han literati were critical of the incorporation of foreign luxury goods, chastising Chinese rulers who “sought the Man and Mo products in order to dazzle the Central Kingdom”

²⁶ Jia Yi was a staunch imperialist and his Three Models Five Baits proposal addressed the problems with the Han as all as the Xiongnu. He viewed the *heqin* policy as bringing about a situation wherein the Xiongnu were the “lords above” and the Chinese “the vassals below” [*Han shu* 48:2240]. While the Five Baits appear to have addressed the weaknesses of the Xiongnu, the Three Models lectured on the proper ways of the Han ruler. The three models proposed – based on principles of humanity, benevolence, and sincerity – were more for the Chinese emperor to follow than standards that should be held by the Xiongnu in hopes of molding them into more civilized people. It was not the aim that the Xiongnu should follow these models, rather that they should abandon the barbaric ruler and follow the Chinese ruler who demonstrates the qualities outlined in the three models.

²⁷ The detailed description of the Five Baits is told only in the “Xiongnu” chapter in the *Xin shu*, and it is this text which is analyzed below [*Xin shu* 4.1: 28-9].

(求蠻、貉之物以眩中國) [*Yan tie lun* 1.3]. Imperialist bureaucrats supposedly argued for the exportation of goods which were overabundant or second grade quality to the northerners in order to garner their luxury goods and drain the coffers of the steppe rulers.

汝、漢之金，織微之貢，所以誘外國而釣羌、胡之寶也。夫中國一端之縵，得匈奴累金之物，而損敵國之用。

The gold of Ru and Han [Rivers] are minute tribute and that which lures the foreign states and hooks the treasures of the Qiang and Hu. Thus the Central Kingdom for one end of silk obtains the Xiongnu accumulations of gold objects and diminishes the resources of the enemy states. [*Yan tie lun* 1.2]

An assortment of mounts and pack animals – horses, donkeys, camels and the like – as well as other treasures from the steppes – furs, rugs, jade, and precious stones – were deemed “treasures of the state” (國之寶) that flowed in. The numerous precious metal steppe-style belt plaques discussed in the previous chapter (whether manufactured in China or imported) certainly highlight the incorporations of steppe exotica in Han élite society. The literati argued against the value of tribute such as mules and the redundancy of treasures like jade which could be obtained from within the borders of the Chinese empire.

The first of the Five Baits called for lavish means of transport, providing carriages dressed with embroidery and brocade tapestry, decorated with great carvings, and adorned with silver. The vehicles were to be drawn by equally exquisite steeds, taken by Xiongnu lords on their journeys and seen by all the Xiongnu people. Chariots seem to have been among the gifts given from the Chinese, as seen in the exchange of letters between the aging Modun and the Han Empress Lü. Also, the early first century *Debates*

on *Salt and Iron* describe the standard Xiongnu vehicle equipment as having “no silver or gold,²⁸ silk or lacquer ornaments” (無銀黃絲漆之飾) [*Yan tie lun* 9.4].

The second bait aimed to please the mouths of the Xiongnu by presenting them with all manner of meats: roasted meats, minced meats, hashed and pickled meats. Here there seems to be a great departure from the millet, leaven and other grains offered, and several mentions of wine imply that if this strategy were applied it would likely include liquor as well for the steppe style feasts. The Chinese also characterized the Xiongnu as lacking in extravagance of costume, especially for the women, and without engravings and palaces [*Yan tie lun* 9.4]. Thus, the third was the gift of beautiful women dressed in embroidery to wait on them in their retinues, to play with and feed them, and to play instruments, sing and dance. The fourth bait sought to feed the bellies of their ambition for palatial residences with the bestowal of high halls, immense homes²⁹, kitchens, great stores of livestock³⁰, and places filled with horses and with chariots. If all these gifts had been bestowed on the Xiongnu lords, they would theoretically have possessed the ability to host guests, hold feasts, distribute wealth and thereby assemble powerful leaders and armies about them. This possibility struck at the heart of the imperial confederacy.

²⁸ The Chinese character provided in this passage is simply “yellow,” though its pairing with the character for silver and the frequent designation of gold by saying “yellow metal” shows that gold was the implied meaning.

²⁹ Peter Alford Andrews (1999) has documented a long tradition in the steppe of complex camps with ordained layouts and orientations as well as a variety of tents for reception, residence and stores. While there were certainly permanent walled sites constructed within the steppe territory of the Xiongnu, the halls, houses and kitchens mentioned here for broad bestowal may just as well refer to tents and princely pavilions as they would for cities that could be “handed over” to the nomads.

³⁰ The characters noted in the text for “stores” of livestock are *qun* 囷 (granary) and *jing* 京 (storage pit), but are used as a compound word before the modified noun *chu* 畜 (livestock). It can be surmised then that the characters for means of storage used here did not refer necessarily to granaries and storage pits.

The policy described in the “Xiongnu” chapter is well aware that “the difficulty of the great man of the barbarians is the lineages [and their leaders]” (夫胡大人難親也) [*Xin shu* 4.1: 28]. If the situation of a child as ruler were to arise, then “the noble princes would be greatly covetous” (貴人子好可愛者) [*Xin shu* 4.1: 28]. Power struggles at the center and contended successions could break out easily into factionalism. This strategy of baits correctly observed the tension between the chanyu and his entourage at the center in opposition to the numerous regional constituents and their leaders. This was indeed the weak point of the Xiongnu state (Di Cosmo 2002: 217-26), and it was a necessity for the mobile ruler to go on imperial tours to give feasts and wealth to his subordinate leaders. The baits surely listed those things which the Xiongnu nobility would “salivate” at the sight of, but these are not the epitome of Chinese goods, rather they are variations and extravagancies of a pastoral diet, paraphernalia and retinue. The gifts bestowed in the *heqin* treaties differed greatly from the baits proposed by Jia Yi. The tribute in the former strategy of appeasement consisted of gold, grains, silk and royal brides sent to the chanyu (Yü 1986, Barfield 1989, Jagchid and Symons 1989), while the latter approach sought to distribute chariots, feasting meat, and court ladies to the multitude of Xiongnu nobility. They were, to borrow a phrase from the previous chapter of this dissertation, exotic goods in domestic contexts. These baits constituted the surplus wealth that fed the state machine, the material means by which the ruler garnered the allegiance of local leaders who filled the ranks of generals and officers of the state and those below them. The cornerstone to this diplomatic strategy of baits was the disruption of the tribute system which bound the confederacy together.

將(軍)[使]單于無臣之使，無民之守，夫惡得不係頸(稽)[頓]類，請歸陛下之義哉？

If the generals, emissaries and chanyu are without the employment of ministers and are without the protection of the people, then how can they not have their necks bound and be made to kowtow, requesting to return to Your Majesty's benevolence? [*Xinshu* 4.1:29]

The resulting competition and dissension would theoretically lead to a breakdown of the political network and the power base of the chanyu.

故三表已諭，五餌既明，則匈奴之中乖而相疑矣。

Thus if the three models have been decreed and the five baits have been made evident, then amidst the Xiongnu will be dissent and [they will be] suspicious of each other. [*Xinshu* 4.1:29]

The most often cited passage of the Han records that has been used in support of arguments for the Chinese goods acting as “sugar-coated bullets” is the protestation of the defected Chinese minister Zhonghang Yue 中行說 to his new sovereign the Xiongnu chanyu Jiyu.

初，匈奴好漢繒絮食物，中行說曰：匈奴人衆不能當漢之一郡，然所以疆者，以衣食異，無仰於漢也。今單于變俗好漢物，漢物不過什二，則匈奴盡歸於漢矣。其得漢繒絮，以馳草棘中，衣芑皆裂敝，以示不如旃裘之完善也。得漢食物皆去之，以示不如湏酪之便美也。於是說教單于左右疏記，以計課其人紅畜物。

In the beginning, the Xiongnu³¹ had a liking for Han raw silks and foods, and Zhonghang Yue said, “The multitudes of Xiongnu cannot equal one province of the Han. Even so, that which makes them strong is that clothing and food is different, and there is no [need to] rely on the Han. Now the chanyu changes customs and has a liking for Han goods. [Though] Han goods do not exceed two tenths [of our materials], the Xiongnu will come to completely submit to the Han. [When] you receive Han silks, and gallop among the grasses and brambles, the clothing and trousers will all split and tatter, showing that they are not like the sturdy and excellent quality of the woolen and fur garments. [When you] receive the Han consumables discard them all and this shows that they are not as fitting and delicious as milk and cheese.” At that time Yue instructed [those to] the left and right of the chanyu [how] to annotate and record and to account and levy taxes on their people and animals. [Shiji 110: 2899]

Zhonghang Yue reasons that these exotic goods, especially silk which dominated the tribute gifts, did not belong in the context of the steppes, and the domestic goods were superior in every way. He attempts to dissuade the chanyu from an unreasonable

³¹ In the *Han shu* [94A: 3759], the passage is written as “the chanyu had a liking” rather than “the Xiongnu had a liking.”

addiction that will lead to a detrimental dependence upon Chinese goods and eventually subservience to China. Interpretations and uses of this passage have maintained this argument, following two main lines of reasoning: (a) *economic subservience* - contending that a dependence on outside goods would undermine the state, and (b) *cultural subservience* - the incorporation of outside goods would lead to the acculturation, or sinification, of the northerners and the fading of an identity independent of China.

There is no mention of, nor does there seem to be any material evidence of, control of production by the imperial governing body in the steppes, not even for luxury goods. The imperial aristocratic clans may not have possessed the power to control production, but, by the nature of the demands and grants mentioned in the *heqin* agreements, they appear to have possessed the crucial ability to force the opening of border markets and to directly obtain foreign foods, dressings, and opulent treasures that could be displayed, redistributed or consumed at gatherings of the important kings, chiefs, and on down. If, for the case of foreign goods, we follow Di Cosmo's (2002) shift from economic to political discussions, we may consider the political significance of the goods imported along a number of routes. In order to foster the *political subservience* of the local leaders to the imperial aristocratic clans, it may have served them best to encourage the elite consumption of foreign goods over domestically produced foods and luxury items. A strategy such as the Five Baits, which aimed at distributing tribute directly to the local leaders, would have undermined the state not because of an acculturating nature of the foreign goods but rather from the elimination of their restriction to control by the imperial rulers. The validity of Zhonghang Yue's criticism of the chanyu for "changing

customs and having a liking for Han goods” diminishes in light of the concluding narrative of his role in advising the Xiongnu ruler.

自是之後，漢使欲辯論者，中行說輒曰：「漢使無多言，顧漢所輸匈奴繒絮米糲，令其量中，必善美而已矣，何以為言乎？且所給備善則已；不備，(苦)[寵]惡，則候秋孰，以騎馳蹂而稼穡耳。」日夜教單于候利害處。

From then onward, when the Han emissaries wished to argue and debate, Zhonghang Yue in every instance would say, “The Han emissaries [should] not have so many words. Instead, the silk cloth and thread and the grain and leaven brought to the Xiongnu by the Han [should] now [have] their measure be certain, of good quality, and exquisite, and that is it. Wherefore should there be words? Hence, if that which is given is prepared of fine quality then alright, [but if] not prepared [so] and are rough and foul then in the season of autumn harvest then cavalry will gallop and trample [over your] crops.” Day and night [he] instructed the chanyu as to the conditions of advantage and the places [to cause] harm. [*Shiji* 110: 2901]

His repugnance for Xiongnu consumption of Chinese raw silks and consumables in the previous statement disappears in this chastisement of the Han emissaries, in which he insists that the Han send raw silks and grains in appropriate measure and of fitting quality. The goods which Zhonghang Yue had previously suggested be discarded are, in this statement, demanded from the Chinese. I do not wish to explore the nature of and reason for these conflicting statements, but rather highlight them to emphasize that we should not employ such passages as incontrovertible evidence that to receive foreign goods was deemed a detrimental practice.

An equally famous passage which is often used to corroborate Zhonghang Yue’s supposed plea to boycott Chinese goods is found among the imperial inscriptions of the eighth century Türks. The text was inscribed on the southern face of a four-sided inscribed stone stele of the Second Türk Empire commissioned by Bilge Qağan (716-734 AD) known as the Kül Tigin Orkhon inscription. Bilge Qağan was a formidable early ruler of the newly revitalized Türk Empire centered in Mongolia, reformed in the late seventh century after divisive period of fifty years. The grandeur of the previous Türk

Empire (552-630), as well as the relationship of the splintered Türk remnants with the Chinese of the new Tang Empire during the seventh century, were at the forefront of the mind of the author(s) of the stele inscriptions.

The place from which the tribes can be (best) controlled is the Ötükan mountains. Having stayed in this place, I came to an amicable agreement with the Chinese people. They give (us) gold, silver, and silk in abundance. The words of the Chinese have always been sweet and the materials of the Chinese have always been soft. Deceiving by means of (their) sweet words and soft materials, the Chinese are said to cause remote peoples to come close in this manner. After such a people have settled close to them, (the Chinese) are said to plan their ill will there. (The Chinese) do not let the real wise men and the real brave men make progress. If a man commits an error, (the Chinese) do not give shelter to anybody (from his immediate family) to the families of his clan and tribe. Having been taken in by their sweet words and soft materials, you Turkish people, were killed in great numbers. O Turkish people you will die! ...If you go toward those places, O Turkish people, you will die! If you stay in the land of Ötükan and send caravans from there, you will have no trouble. If you stay at the Ötükan mountains you will live forever dominating the tribes! (Tekin 1968: 261-2)

While the warning may at first appear to pertain to the avoidance of taking the “soft goods” of the Chinese, these along with “sweet words” were only a means to an end. The real danger lay in baiting the northerners to “settle close” to the Chinese territories and eventually living among the Chinese and under their prejudiced laws. Honey (1992) admittedly does not include the Türk Empires in his discussion of sinicization since they were not one of the so-called conquest dynasties of northerners, like the Tuoba Wei 拓跋魏 (386-535), who attempted to rule over Chinese populations and Chinese northern territories. It was thus the permanent move into the Chinese realm which ran the risk of leading to subservience. If one ruled over the northern steppes and mountains and came to an “amicable agreement with the Chinese,” sending caravans south to engage in trade for “soft goods” and the like, then there would be no troubles. The lesson here is the perseverance of a steppe centered state.

The initial period of the *heqin* agreements marked what appears to have been a period of relative stability of the steppe empire. Linear succession from Modun to his eldest son Jiyu, and then to Jiyu's his eldest son Junchen totaled eighty-four years of uncontested rule and transference thereof. Ten years after the Chinese under Emperor Wu declared open war, the chanyu Junchen died and the first succession conflict occurred. It was the first of many, and although some of the strategies in future conflicts seem the same, they stemmed from different controversies, were executed in varied manners, and yielded drastically different results.

The Militant Emperor and the Chinese Offensive

Beginning with the Han military campaigns against diplomatic interactions with the Xiongnu during the reign of the “Militant” Han Emperor Wu,³² the Chinese records contained more detailed information about the inner politics of the Xiongnu empire and its constituents. The particular intrigues of the Xiongnu recorded from the late second century BC onward do not necessarily constitute an increase in such occurrences, though they do allow for a clearer understanding of some of the extenuating circumstances that contributed to the crises of the early first century BC. In the following summaries I will focus on the actions of the Xiongnu and their responses to the pressures that escalated into the first century BC, more than the focus of previous studies on the actions of the Chinese (cf. de Crespigny 1984). Which manners of crisis proved more detrimental to the steppe polity? How well did the political system hold up to increasing power struggles within and mounting pressures from without?

³² The posthumous name for this emperor was “Wu”武 which means “militant.”

When the long reign of chanyu Junchen ended, his younger brother, the Luli King of the Left, proclaimed himself Yichixia 伊穢斜 chanyu, thus overstepping the claim of the heir apparent and eldest son of Junchen, named Yudan 於單. We are not told what degree of support Yichixia obtained among the imperial nobles for his claim, but there apparently existed enough of a threat from Yudan that Yichixia launched an attack against him. The forces of the heir apparent were broken, and he fled southward to submit to the Han. Numerous defections occurred in both directions during the course of peace and war between the Han and the Xiongnu, so the precedent of submission was already well established. However, this constituted the first recorded incident of the submission of a Xiongnu royal chief. The Han established him in the frontier as the Marquis of She'an 涉安侯, though several months later he died. Lateral succession, such as that of Yichixia chanyu, was not inherently divergent from the spectrum of accepted practice. As many later lateral successions were not accompanied by armed conflict, it is the division of support for more than claimant and accompanying violence which set Yichixia's establishment apart from the previous successions.

Yichixia later suffered a great defeat from the Han armies and fled in chaos. The Xiongnu aristocracy took him for dead, and so the Luli King of the Right, perhaps a brother of Yichixia, declared himself chanyu. As a testament to the firmness of Yichixia's control, when he reappeared the Luli King of the Left rescinded his claim. The strength of Yichixia's descent was well established and the next two chanyus followed the previous custom of primogeniture. The eldest son of Yichixia became Wuwei 烏維 chanyu with no indication of associated conflict. He continued with refusals to the Han to

send them an heir apparent as hostage, and the Chinese attempts to garner alliances against the Xiongnu with the Wusun 烏孫 and Daxia 大夏 Inner Asian powers in the far west failed.

After ten relatively uneventful years of Han-Xiongnu relations, Wuwei passed away and the supreme position of chanyu passed to his eldest son Wushilu 烏師廬. He was young at the time of his accession, and thus called the “Boy Chanyu” 兒單于. The defeat in battle of Yichixia and the attempts of the Han to interfere with Xiongnu politics may have been part of the impetus for Wushilu to move further northwest and establish Left and Right seats of power at Yunzhong 雲中 and at Jiuquan 九泉 and Dunhuang 敦煌, respectively. [*Shiji* 110: 2914].³³ This may also have reflected an attempt to shift the focus of the steppe empire more toward interactions with groups to the west, since conflict with the Han had halted the flow of tribute and open routes of border markets. Perhaps from a perceived weakness of youth, the Han not only sent an emissary to congratulate the new chanyu, but also one each to the Wise Kings of the Left and Right in an attempt to set the Xiongnu in opposition with each other. Wushilu quickly arrested the Han emissaries sent to the potential rivals [*Shiji* 110: 2915]. This Han attempt to become directly involved with the royal successions may have stemmed from the disaffected Yudan surrendering to the Chinese and a subsequent desire to aggravate conflicts within the nomadic royal circles. The Han appear to have wished for a unified Xiongnu state

³³ The previous Left and Right seats of power along the Chinese frontier had been in Shanggu 上谷, near Manchuria, and Shangjun 上郡, just south of the northern bend of the Yellow River, and a court of the chanyu had been established in the area of Yunzhong and Dai [*Shiji* 110: 2891]. The subsequent moves by Wushilu chanyu set the Left seat at Yunzhong just north of the Yellow River where the previous Xiongnu chanyu seat had been, and the Left seat shifted much farther west along the Gansu corridor.

during the times of the *heqin* policies, assuming that “the chanyu’s power over his own people at least ensured some measure of control over otherwise endemic border disturbance” and a “single authority was better than a multitude” (de Crespigny 1984: 182-3). However, this core misunderstanding of the Xiongnu polity, upon which the *heqin* approach was founded, gave way, and the Han appear to have switched to a divisive approach.

Perhaps in a bid for his own power or for the support of another candidate, or even from general dissatisfaction with the rulership of Wushilu, the Grand General of the Left hatched plans to assassinate Wushilu, submit to the Han, and procure their aid in the process [*Shiji* 110: 2915]. He sent word to the Chinese, who established a City for Receiving Submissions 受降城, for them to send an army northward, but the “Boy Chanyu” discovered the plot. He executed the Grand General of the Left, summarily defeated the invading Chinese army utilizing troops from the Left, and captured or pressed into defection the Chinese generals. This military victory came after a bad winter in which “the Xiongnu had great snows, and many of the livestock starved or froze to death” (匈奴大雨雪畜多飢寒死) [*Shiji* 110: 2915].³⁴ Attacks immediately after this, however, did not appear to weaken or greatly harm the Xiongnu under the leadership of Wushilu. The Chinese accounts depicted this chanyu as “[though] young in years, was fond of killing and attacking, and many people of the state were not at peace” (年少好殺

³⁴ This manner of winter with heavy snows is known in Mongolia as a “white disaster” (*tsagaan zud*) since the excess of snow covers over the land to the point where livestock cannot get through to the winter grasses. The opposite “black disaster” (*khar zud*) can be equally detrimental if the winter is so dry that no white snows cover the land in winter and the early spring melt offs are thus so thin that they do not provide enough revitalizing water to the spring shoots or yield sufficient drinking water in the streambeds. The descriptions of winter disasters thus naturally revolve around the delicate balance of the amount of snow fall.

伐國人多不安) [*Shiji* 110: 2915]. In any case, having fended off a coup and major defection, survived a harsh winter with full military capacity, and begun plundering the frontier in recompense for the Han invasion, the “Boy Chanyu” could hardly have been considered weak. Unfortunately, in his third year, when he had prepared for further attacks upon the City for Receiving Submissions, he died.

Because the son of Wushilu was young in years, “the Xiongnu thus established” (匈奴乃立) his uncle, Wulei’s younger brother the Wise King of the Right, Goulihu 响犁湖, as chanyu [*Shiji* 110: 2916]. The fortitude of the collective decision to install Goulihu mirrored the strength with which the Xiongnu demolished the newly built Han frontier fortifications. The Xiongnu continued to launch waves of plundering and forestall any significant victories by the Chinese, but yet again, as the chanyu mounted for an attack on the City for Receiving Submission, he died. Yet again pursuing lateral successions, “the Xiongnu thus established” a younger brother of the previous chanyu, collectively raising Judihou 且鞮侯 as supreme chanyu [*Shiji* 110: 2917]. This reign continued much as the previous era had, with continuous warfare and overall stalemate.

The following establishment returned to a linear succession when the eldest son of Judihou, the Wise King of the Left, was installed as Hulugu 狐鹿姑 chanyu, but a minor misunderstanding occurred in the process.

初，且鞮侯兩子，長為左賢王，次為左大將，病且死，言立左賢王。左賢王未至，貴人以為有病，更立左大將為單于。左賢王聞之，不敢進。左大將使人召左賢王而讓位焉。左賢王辭以病，左大將不聽，謂曰：「即不幸死，傳之於我。」左賢王許之，遂立為狐鹿姑單于。狐鹿姑單于立，以左大將為左賢王，數年病死，其子先賢擇不得代，更以為日逐王。日逐王者，賤於左賢王。單于自以其子為左賢王。

In the beginning, Judihou chanyu had two sons. The eldest was Wise King of the Left, the second was the Great General of the Left. When [the chanyu] fell ill and died, [they] discussed and established the Wise King of the Left. The Wise King of the Left had not yet arrived and the nobles considered him fallen ill, [so]

progressed to establish the Great General of the Left as chanyu. The Wise King of the Left heard this and didn't dare enter. The Great General of the Left sent someone to call the Wise King of the Left and concede the position to him. The Wise King of the Left declined citing illness, and the Great General of the Left did not hear [of this], and said, "[Only] if the unfortunate death [of the Wise King of the Left should come], [then] pass it on to me." The Wise King of the Left approved of this and [he] was subsequently established as Hulugu chanyu. When Hulugu chanyu was established, he had the Great General of the Left made Wise King of the Left. Yet after several years [he] fell ill and died, and his son Xianxianchan could not take his place and was thus made Rizhu King. The Rizhu King was subordinate to the Wise King of the Left. The chanyu proclaimed his son as the Wise King of the Left. [*Han shu* 94A: 3778]

This small turn of events eventually led to the establishment of the eldest son, but had concluded with the understanding that when the Wise King of the Left died, the supreme position would pass to his younger brother, the Great General of the Left who was raised to the position of Wise King of the Left in the meantime. With his untimely death, it was the new chanyu Hulugu's son who then took the spot of heir apparent, leaving Xianxianchan 先賢擇, the son of the younger brother who was too young in years, to be established as the Rizhu 日逐 King beneath the Wise King of the Left. Xianxianchan was eventually made to take a wife from the small conquered state of Wuchanmu 烏禪幕, which had been located between the Wusun and Kangju and subsequently moved to the territories of the Right, and over whom he was left to act as their chief [*Han shu* 94A: 3790].

The ten year reign of Hulugu ushered in escalated conflict with substantial victories, losses and surrenders on both sides. Near the end of his reign, after a series of significant Xiongnu victories, Hulugu sent a letter to the Han emperor declaring:

南有大漢，北有強胡。胡者，天之驕子也，不為小禮以自煩。今欲與漢闔大關，取漢女為妻，歲給遺我彥酒萬石，稷米五千斛，雜繒萬匹，它如故約，則邊不相盜矣。」

To the south is the Great Han, to the north are the Powerful Hu. The Hu are Heaven's proud son, and are not troubled with petty rituals [of propriety]. Now [I] desire to open great relations, to take a Han woman as

wife, yearly be given bestowals unto me of 10,000 piculs of root wine³⁵, 5,000 pecks of millet, 40,000 bolts of silk, [so that] it is approximately like before, and thus the frontier will not be reciprocally robbed. [*Hanshu* 94A: 3780]

This request for a *heqin* agreement was summarily rejected, and the Han claimed itself a state of ritual propriety and eventually accused the Xiongnu of being improper, “in the manner of birds and beasts” (禽獸行), since Modun had killed his own father to take the seat of power. Though the Chinese campaigns had intensified, the resilience of the Xiongnu had not waivered, their boasts had not diminished, and the royal Luandi lineage and the twenty-four great chiefs had not faced any serious schisms or had their right to rule contested.

Internal Conflicts and Joint Offensives

The Militant Han emperor died in 87 BC, and Hulugu not long after in 85 BC. The chanyu reigns after Junchen had been short but strong, showing no faltering of Xiongnu strength over its steppe constituents despite a drastic increase in the might of the Chinese empire. Not until the transition after Hulugu can we trace any accumulation of conflict within the royal lineage. There had been almost as many lateral successions as linear successions up to that point, and each time the claimants had come from within the ranks of sons and brothers of the reigning chanyu, save for the reverse lateral succession to the uncle of the “Boy chanyu.” Real power to determine the next supreme ruler remained the collective right of the more powerful leaders, “thus having the Xiongnu

³⁵ An alcoholic beverage made from *nie* 蘘 roots that has a particularly bitter flavor. Ale (*jiu* 酒), of an unspecified sort, had also been among the gifts in the original *heqin* tribute mission to Modun chanyu [*Shiji* 110: 2895].

establish...the chanyu” (匈奴乃立...單于), and arguments over the next ruler had thus far not resulted in the disaffection of any sizeable contingent. Near the end of the reign of Hulugu, however, two of his brothers were slighted, and, supposedly against his own wishes, his son was established as the next supreme ruler.

初，單于有異母弟為左大都尉，賢，國人鄉之，母闕氏恐單于不立子而立左大都尉也，乃私使殺之。左大都尉同母兄怨，遂不肯復會單于庭。又單于病且死，謂諸貴人：「我子少，不能治國，立弟右谷蠡王。」及單于死，衛律等與顛渠闕氏謀，匿單于死，詐矯單于令，與貴人飲盟，更立子左谷蠡王為壺衍鞮單于。

壺衍鞮單于既立，風謂漢使者，言欲和親。左賢王、右谷蠡王以不得立怨望，率其眾欲南歸漢。恐不能自致，即脅盧屠王，欲與西降烏孫，謀擊匈奴。盧屠王告之，單于使人驗問，右谷蠡王不服，反以其罪罪盧屠王，國人皆冤之。於是二王去居其所，未嘗肯會龍城。

單于年少初立，母闕氏不正，國內乖離，常恐漢兵襲之。

In the beginning, the chanyu had a younger brother by a different mother who was the Great Commandant of the Left and wise and the people of the state were beside him. The Mother Empress feared the chanyu would not establish [their] son, and establish the Great Commandant of the Left, and [she] thus privately sent someone to kill him. The Great Commandant of the Left was angry with the mother and older brother, and subsequently was not willing to return to the gatherings at the court of the chanyu. And the chanyu fell ill and died. [He] told the various noblemen, “My son is few [in years] and cannot govern the state, so establish my younger brother the Luli King of the Right” and then the chanyu died. Wei Lu and others with the Zhuanqu Empress³⁶ schemed, concealed the chanyu’s death, falsified the commission of the chanyu’s decree, and with the nobles drinking to an oath, then established [her] son, the Luli King of the Left, as Huyanti chanyu.

When Huyanti chanyu had just been established, he admonished the Han emissaries, saying he desired a *heqin* [agreement]. The Wise King of the Left and Luli King of the Right held resentment that [he] had not been established and led their people south wanting to submit to the Han. [They] were fearful and could not arrive from there, already being threatened by the Luchu King, and wanted to go west to submit to the Wusun and plan to attack the Xiongnu. The Luchu King told them, and the chanyu sent someone to investigate. The Luli King of the Right did not concede, but turned his crime and placed guilt on the Luchu King, and the people of the state all falsely accused him. At that time the two kings departed to the (areas) in which they resided and were never again willing to gather at Long City.

The chanyu was few in years when first established, the Mother Empress had been improper, and the state was in opposition, often fearing the Han troops would attack them. [*Han shu* 94A: 3781-2]

All of the possible claimants – the Great General of the Left, Luli King of the Right, and perhaps even Wise King of the Right – were among the twenty-four great chiefs and from

³⁶ The general term for consort or wife of the chanyu was *yanshi* 闕氏, and it seems that the equivalent of the ruling emperors’ mother or Empress Dowager (“mother wife” 母闕氏) was the wife with the additional title of Zhuanqu, thus transcribed here as the Zhuanqu Empress 顛渠闕氏.

the royal lineage. In the end, all three nobles withdrew to the areas in which they resided and refused to gather at the court of the chanyu at Long City 龍城.³⁷

The mention of the Luchu King 廬屠王 draws our attention again to role of the named kings in politics. This king was powerful enough to threaten two of the great chiefs of the royal lineage, and apparently among those leaders close to the chanyu ruler. Several decades earlier in 121 BC, Yichixia chanyu had been angered when two kings in the west, the Hunye 渾邪 and Xiuchu 休屠 kings, after defeats by the Han armies, planned to submit. The Hunye King, after killing the Xiuchu king and joining his forces, achieved the appellation of “one hundred thousand” – an astounding title considering the twenty-four great chiefs bore the titles of “ten thousand cavalry” – and brought with him an entourage including his minister of state (*xianguo* 相國), commandant, household administrator, subordinate kings, over 8000 ranks, as well as the metal idol(s) for worshiping Heaven (*jitian jinren* 祭天金人)³⁸ and the heir apparent of the Xiuchu King [Shiji 111: 2930].³⁹ The subordinate kings of the Hunye king also held Inner Asian

³⁷ The character given in the *Shiji* for Long 龍 retains an additional radical overtop the character for Long 龍 given in the *Han shu*, which means “dragon.” De Crespigny (1984: 507-8 n.15) discredits Chinese assumptions of dragon worship mentioned in the *Han shu* as gross misunderstandings of Xiongnu customs and argues against the later attributed meaning of the place name Long-cheng 龍城 as “Dragon City” 龍城. He instead supports JJM De Groot (1921) who equates *long* 龍/龍 to the Ongi River (онги гол) (44/47° N – 102/105° E) just south of the famous Orkhon River Valley. Wang (1983) also makes a similar assertion as to the location of the so-called capital of the Xiongnu at Long-cheng, and de Crespigny in the end concurs with the more general concept that the court of the chanyu probably migrated within a core region of the Orkhon or Ongin river valleys.

³⁸ The idol(s) are described literally as “metal people” 金人. The character for metal (金) can refer to either bronze or gold, but most often denotes a precious metal, as opposed to iron or other such materials. Many luxury items found from this period are a combination of several metals – gilded bronze or iron covered in bronze, for instance – and the ritual figures would certainly have been constructed with precious metals at least on the exterior.

³⁹ The heir apparent to the Xiuchu King, Jin Midi 金日磾, was given the Chinese name of Wengshu 翁叔 and employed as horse attendant under the eunuchs within the Yellow Gate of the Han capital. Details of

territorial names – Huduni呼毒尼, Yingbi鷹庇, and Qinli禽梨 – and were given Chinese marquis titles [*Shi ji* 111: 2933]. All of the high and subordinate named kings were powerful enough that their elimination from the ranks of the Xiongnu and submission to the Han supposedly brought about peace in the Chinese frontier areas of Longxi隴西 and the western reaches of the Yellow River that the Xiongnu had previously retaken after the Qin expansion [*Shiji* 110: 2909-2910]. The frontier kings had grown so powerful during the Han-Xiongnu wars and posed such a threat of defecting to the side of the Chinese that

匈奴見甌脫王在漢, 恐以爲(道)[導]擊之, 西北遠去, 不敢南逐水草, 發人民屯甌脫.

the Xiongnu seeing the frontier kings within the Han and fearing [they] would lead attacks against them, moved far to the northwest, daring not to venture south in pursuit of grass and water, and sent out people to garrison the frontier. [*Han shu* 94A: 3783]

The Xiongnu rulers continued to rely on the named kings as well as the high kings of the twenty-four great chiefs. After the death of his brother, the Luli King of the Left, Huyanti chanyu sent the Liwu King犁汗王 to get a glimpse of the frontier along the Gansu corridor at the points of Jiuquan and Zhangye張掖. The king reported that these areas were weak targets prime for attack, and thus was sent out with the Wise King of the Right to attack the Han fortifications at Zhangye. The assault was defeated through the direction of the Chinese Grand Protectorate of Zhangye張掖太守 and by the maneuvers of two leaders of the Attached State under Chinese control in that area⁴⁰ – the Yiqu King

his life story are narrated within the chapter of the *Han shu* dedicated to him and Huo Guang 霍光 (chapter 68). Xiongnu constituents in the Chinese capital area who had defected or been captured, such as Jin Midi, would have been a source of information for accounts about the Xiongnu (cf. Di Cosmo 2002: 270).

⁴⁰ The Attached States (*shuguo* 屬國) policy was developed by the Han to settle conquered regions and chiefs along the frontier in a semi-autonomous fashion. The Yiqu were one of the so-called Rong 戎 tribes of the north which had been conquered during expansion of the state of Qin and had, by the time of the Han, become a county in the north managed through the system of Attached States [*Han shu* 84: 3413, 94A: 3747].

appointed as Attached State Thousand Chief 屬國千長義渠王 and the Attached State Commandant Guo Zhong 屬國都尉郭忠. As a result, the Yiqu King was given gold and horses and enfeoffed as the new Liwu King, with apparent control of the Liwu territory [HS 94A: 3783].

In the narratives of the battles of 78 BC, we begin to read of problems not only with local kings within the Xiongnu periphery, but also with the Wuhuan 烏桓⁴¹ and other powerful groups which had previously been tribute paying tribes much in the same arrangement as the Chinese. Once the Wuhuan, Wusun, Dingling and other tribes began to challenge Xiongnu hegemony, the Chinese found a series of assaults which they could adjoin with to their advantage.

漢復得匈奴降者，言烏桓嘗發先單于冢，匈奴怨之，方發二萬騎擊烏桓。大將軍霍光欲發兵(要)[邀]擊之，以問護軍都尉趙充國。充國以為「烏桓間數犯塞，今匈奴擊之，於漢便。又匈奴希寇盜，北邊幸無事。蠻夷自相攻擊，而發兵要之，招寇生事，非計也。」光更問中郎將范明友，明友言可擊。於是拜明友為度遼將軍，將二萬騎出遼東。匈奴聞漢兵至，引去。

The submitting Xiongnu whom the Han had obtained said the Wuhuan had opened the tomb of a previous chanyu, and the Xiongnu were angry with them and sent out 20,000 cavalry to attack the Wuhuan.⁴² The Grand General Huo Guang wanted to send out troops and made a request to attack them, asking the Commandant of the Protectorate Army Zhao Chongguo. Chongguo considered [the matter, saying,] “Among the Wuhuan several have attacked garrisons, and now the Xiongnu are attacking them, which is advantageous for the Han. The Xiongnu also hope to plunder and steal, so the northern frontier is fortunate and without affairs [of concern]. The Man and Yi [barbarians] are attacking each other⁴³, and [each] sending out troops to threaten [the other], causing plundering and giving rise to affairs, and it is not a scheme [which was put into play by the Han].” Guang then asked the Mid General Fan Mingyou, and Mingyou said [he] could attack. At that time of paying respects, Mingyou was the General for Crossing the

⁴¹ The Wuhuan resided in present day southern Manchuria, along the far northeastern border of the Han empire. They were originally considered collectively as part of the Eastern Hu barbarians, along with the Xianbei 鮮卑 tribes of northern Manchuria.

⁴² This event narrated in the *Hou Han shu* [90: 2981] says “At the time of Emperor Zhao, the Wuhuan gradually became strong, and opened the tomb of a Xiongnu chanyu to requite for the enmity of Modun. The Xiongnu were greatly angered and hence went east, attacked and smashed the Wuhuan” (昭帝時烏桓漸強乃發匈奴單于冢墓以報冒頓之怨匈奴大怨乃東擊破烏桓).

⁴³ The Chinese chroniclers utilized several names for the more general concept of non-Chinese peoples or “barbarians.” While the names of Hu, Man, and Yi often held regional connotations associated with the four cardinal directions, the names Man and Yi are used more generally here to refer to the concepts of conflicts between different barbarian groups, in this specific case the Xiongnu and the Wuhuan, who would more regularly come under the broad label of Hu.

Liao and led 20,000 cavalry out of Liaodong. The Xiongnu heard the Han troops were coming, and led [their men] away. [HS 94A: 3784]

After the Xiongnu suffered several defeats on the southeastern fronts, they sent emissaries to the Wusun in the far west, asking for assistance. This call for assistance became the signal of weakness to the Wusun, who soon engaged in joint assaults upon the Xiongnu with assistance from the Chinese [*Han shu* 94A: 3785-6]. The Xiongnu suffered severe defeat when the combined armies captured the camp of the Luli King of the Right and with it seized over 50,000 horses, cattle, donkeys, mules and camels, over 600,000 sheep, and captured [some of] the chanyu's uncles (父行) and aunts (嫂), princesses (居次), named kings, and the Liwu commandant, chief of 1000 men, and general as well as 39,000 ranks beneath them [*Han shu* 94A: 3786; 70: 3004]. Soon after, this victory, the Wusun robbed the Chinese general of all the spoils. The Wusun then appeared to be the main force behind the assaults in the west, showing no intention of yielding to Chinese authority, and the chronicles state that from that point on “the Xiongnu subsequently grew weak and diminished and feared the Wusun” (匈奴遂衰耗, 怨烏孫) [*Han shu* 94A: 3786]. The Xiongnu attempted a campaign to retrieve those captured in the following winter, but we are told this only led to further disaster and assaults from other groups.

其冬，單于自將萬騎擊烏孫，頗得老弱，欲還。會天大雨雪，一日深丈餘，人民畜產凍死，還者不能什一。於是丁令乘弱攻其北，烏桓入其東，烏孫擊其西。凡三國所殺數萬級，馬數萬匹，牛羊甚紅。又重以餓死，人民死者什三，畜產什五，匈奴大虛弱，諸國羈屬者皆瓦解，攻盜不能理。其後漢出三千餘騎，為三道，並入匈奴，捕虜得數千人還。匈奴終不敢取當，茲欲鄉和親，而邊境少事矣。

In the winter, the chanyu himself led 10,000 cavalry to attack the Wusun, intending to get [back] the old and weak [as he] desired their return. It came that Heaven precipitated great snows, measuring great depths in a single day. Livestock and people froze to death and those who returned could not have been one tenth. At that time, the Dingling took advantage of the weakness and attacked their north, the Wuhuan invaded

their east, and the Wusun attacked their west. Altogether those who were killed by the three states were several tens of thousands of ranks, several tens of thousands of horses, and a great multitude of cattle and sheep. Also the people who died from starvation were three tenths, and the livestock were five tenths. The Xiongnu became greatly feeble and weak, and the various states which had been bridled all broke apart [like] roof tiles, attacking and robbing, and could not be regulated. After this, the Han ventured out with more than 3000 cavalry in three columns and invaded the Xiongnu [territory], taking prisoners and obtaining the return of several thousand men. The Xiongnu in the end did not dare to take any in recompense. Moreover, [they] desired to approach a *heqin* agreement, and the border territories had few matters [of concern]. [*Han shu* 94A: 3787]

The repercussions of these continued assaults from numerous Inner Asian neighbors did indeed seem to lead to the crumbling away of constituent tribes. A group in the Left territories of West Ru 西囁, which the Xiongnu had previously conquered, drove their livestock away, battling with frontier groups, and eventually went south to submit to the Han. The situation within the Xiongnu regions was described as rampant starvation of people and death of livestock. One may interpret the combat with the frontier groups as an attempt to restrain them from breaking away from the Xiongnu, and several scholars have proposed the easy flight of constituent tribes to be a weakness of the so-called tribal confederacies (Barfield 1989; Doyle 1986; Goldstone and Haldon 2009). However, de Crespigny (1984: 179-80) has asserted such movements as problematic displacements, since the movement of livestock into or through the grazing lands of other tribes would have created disruptive conflicts. It is no surprise, then, that the flight south of the West Ru group through the territories of the frontier groups resulted in great losses of people in armed conflict [*Han shu* 94A: 3788].

Aside from groups within the core territories of the Xiongnu, neighboring tribute groups also rebelled. The city states of the Western Regions together attacked the Xiongnu there, took the state of Jushi 車師, and made off with their kings and inhabitants. The Xiongnu then took the remaining Jushi people with one of their kings and migrated

eastward away from the previous lands, probably closer to the core steppe lands.

Subsequent attempts to reclaim the Jushi lands and take away Western Regions territories from the Wusun failed, and soon the Xiongnu were under pressure again from the Dingling from the north [*Han shu* 94A: 3788-9]. In a last effort, depending again upon named kings, the chanyu Xulüquanqu sent the Ti King 題王 south to request a *heqin* agreement. The request was denied, and Xulüquanqu, who had fallen ill spitting up blood, died soon after [*Han shu* 94A: 3789].

Crisis and Fragmentation

Xulüquanqu had risen to power as the Wise King of the Left and younger brother of Huyanti chanyu. There appeared no conflict surrounding his establishment, but after his installment, he took a daughter of the Great General of the Right as his Great Empress, and dismissed the Zhuanqu Empress whom his older brother Huyanti had favored.⁴⁴ Her father, the Great Juqu of the Left 左大且渠 was consequently greatly angered [*Han shu* 94A: 3787]. When the chanyu Xulüquanqu fell deathly ill, the Zhuanqu Empress plotted with the Wise King of the Right and her younger brother Dulongqi 都隆奇, the new Great Juqu of the Left, to establish the Wise King of the Right, Tuqitang 屠耆堂, as the next chanyu. As soon as Xulüquanqu died, the Hesu King 郝宿王 named Xingweiyang 刑未央 sent people to summon all the various kings, but the Zhuanqu Empress and her fellow schemers quickly established Tuqitan, as the chanyu Wuyanqudi 握衍胸鞮 [*Han shu* 94A:

⁴⁴ Not only was her dismissal a slighting of entrenched power, but it contradicted Xiongnu custom which dictated a subsequent ruler take the wife of his predecessor.

3789]. Whether the details of this intrigue are true or not, the narrative at least imparts to us the conflict created by the dismissal of close kin of the chanyus.

Wuyanqudi was the great grandson of Wuwei chanyu and therefore a far removal from the adjacent linear and lateral successions to sons and brothers which had occurred thus far. The son of Xulüquanqu, Jihoushan 稽侯弼, was not established, and he instead fled to his wife's father, a chief of Wuchanmu in the Right lands. This was the same group over which Xianxianchan, the son of Hulugu chanyu's younger brother, ruled, having been passed up for the heir apparent position of Wise King of the Left in favor of Hulugu's son, Huyanti. This similarly disaffected son was surely angered by the appointments of Huyanti and Xulüquanqu, though no mention is given. When a distant great grandson of a ruler six successions and six decades earlier was established, Xianxianchan understandably held a grudge. Many supporters were allegedly gathering to call for his installment, but instead he led a large number of people south and submitted to the Chinese. The Han enfeoffed Xianxianchan as the Marquis of Virtuous Submission (*guide hou* 歸德侯), and the chanyu Wuyanqudi replaced him with his older cousin as the new Rizhu King [*Han shu* 94A: 3790]. This marked the second instance of a disaffected claimant to venture south, submit to the Han, and be enfeoffed as a marquis.

Both Jihoushan and Xianxianchan retained more proximal claims to the supreme position than Tuqitan, the Wise King of the Right cum chanyu, and seemingly possessed more support for installment. In full recognition of this, Wuyanqudi chanyu immediately set about eliminating his competition, possible claimants, and their respective supporters.

單于初立，凶惡，盡殺虛閭權渠時用事貴人刑未央等，而任用顛渠闕氏弟都隆奇，又盡免虛閭權渠子弟近親，而自以其子弟代之。

When [Woyanqudi] chanyu was first established, [he] became ferocious, completely killing off the nobles, [the Hesu King] Xingweiyang and others that had been used for affairs in the time of Xulüquanqu, and employed the younger brother of the Zhuanqu Empress, Duluqi, as well as completely extracting the sons and younger brothers of Xulüquanqu from [the ranks of] close relatives, and taking his own sons and younger brothers to replace them. [*Han shu* 94A: 3789]

This marked the immediate removal of the previous chanyu's associates who likely held loyalties to other parties. Non-royal kings in the chanyu's entourage such as the Hesu King were quickly replaced by those like the Yiqiuruo King 伊酋若王, younger brother of Wuyanqudi, and the Great Duqu of the Left, younger brother of the empress who had supposedly orchestrated the installation of the new chanyu [*Han shu* 94A: 3789].

While the replacement of associates may have been acceptable from one ruler to the next, the elimination of royal kin from positions of privilege was not. The removal of Xulüquanqu's sons and younger brothers sought to eliminate all immediate claimants like Jihoushan, and although Xianxianchan had gone south to submit, Wuyanqudi executed his two younger brothers as well.

The desire to completely refill the ranks of the empire began to extend into the local kings when the Aojian 奧鞬 King of the Left died. Woyanqudi established his younger son as the new Aojian King and made him stay in residence at court. The nobles of Aojian reacted by appropriately placing the son of the previous Aojian King as the successor and then moving further east. Wuyanqudi sent his Right Prime Minister 右丞相 after them with a punitive force of cavalry, but this first skirmish of the new chanyu's reign ended in loss. Control quickly unraveled and the new chanyu was soon faced with a returning claimant, Jihoushan, with a large force of support behind him.

時單于已立二歲，暴虐殺伐，國中不附。及太子、左賢王數讒左地貴人，左地貴人皆怨。其明年，烏桓擊匈奴東邊姑夕王，頗得人民，單于怒。姑夕王恐，即與烏禪幕及左地貴人共立稽侯犂為呼韓

邪單于，發左地兵四五萬人，西擊握衍胸鞮單于，至姑且水北。未戰，握衍胸鞮單于兵敗走，使人報其弟右賢王曰：「匈奴共攻我，若肯發兵助我乎？」右賢王曰：「若不愛人，殺昆弟諸貴人。各自死若處，無來汗我。」握衍胸鞮單于恚，自殺。左大且渠都隆奇亡之右賢王所，其民衆盡降呼韓邪單于…握衍胸鞮單于立三年而敗。

When the chanyu had been established for two years, there [occurred] a brutal massacre, and the state did not adhere.⁴⁵ Then the heir apparent, the Wise King of the Left, several [times] slandered the noblemen of the Left Territories, and the noblemen of the Left Territories all became angry. In the following year, the Wuhuan attacked the Xiongnu eastern frontier Guxi King, obtaining quite [a number] of people and the chanyu was angry. The Guxi King became fearful and with Wuchanmu and the noblemen of the [Left] Territories all established Jihoushan as Huhanye chanyu, sent out from the Left Territories troops [numbering] 40 to 50 thousand men, went west to attack Woyanqudi chanyu, and reached the northern [reaches] of the Guzu River. Not yet engaged in battle, Woyanqudi chanyu's troops fled in defeat, and [he] sent a person to report to his younger brother the Wise King of the Right saying "The Xiongnu are all attacking us. [Can] you consent to send out troops to help us?" The Wise King of the Right said "You do not show compassion for people, killing the Kundi⁴⁶ and various nobles. Each of these deaths are your doing, and coming from no [provocation] you have insulted us." Woyanqudi chanyu became enraged and killed himself. The Great Juqu of the Left, Duluqi, fled from the Wise King of the Right and his people all submitted to Huhanye...Wuyanqudi chanyu reigned for three years and then was defeated. [*Han shu* 94A: 3789-90]

In these struggles, local tribes, such as Aojian, appeared to defy attempts by the royal clan to interfere with their own ranks, and, in the case of the Guxi King 姑夕王 and Wuchanmu contingents, were able to offer significant support to a competing claimant. In the upheaval that followed the defeat of Wuyanqudi, the local kings not only provided support for royal claimants, they also began to make claims of their own, thus heralding an unprecedented crisis for the royal lineage and its associated imperial clans.

Civil War (58-47 BC) “國中不附”

After the defeat of Wuyanqudi, Huhanye settled at the chanyu court, sent his troops “each to return to their homelands” (各歸故地), and raised his older brother from “among the people” (在民間) to be the Luli King of the Left [*Han shu* 94B: 3795].

⁴⁵ In other words, the state fell apart, or “not adhering,” came undone.

⁴⁶ The Kundi 昆第 named Doumo 兜莫 had been established as the King of Jushi 車師 state in the Western Regions by Xulüquanqu chanyu.

Huhanye quickly urged the nobles of the Right to kill the Wise King of the Right, who had helped establish Wuyanqudi chanyu. The nobles of the Right did not heed the command of the new chanyu and instead followed the Wise King of the Right, with his previous accomplice Dulongqi, to raise a competing chanyu. The older cousin of Wuyanqudi, who had been established as the Rizhu King to replace the defected Xianxianchan, was raised by those in the Right as the chanyu Tuqi 屠耆. A swiftly defeated Huhanye fled east, to the territories of the Left, and the new ruler Tuqi took residence at the chanyu court, appointing his own Luli Kings of the Left and Right. The same cohort that had placed Wuyanqudi in power made a second bid with Tuqi. It is not certain how close to the main royal line Tuqi was, but as a cousin of the great grandson of a previous chanyu, he was probably similarly far removed from the conventional selection of sons and younger brothers.

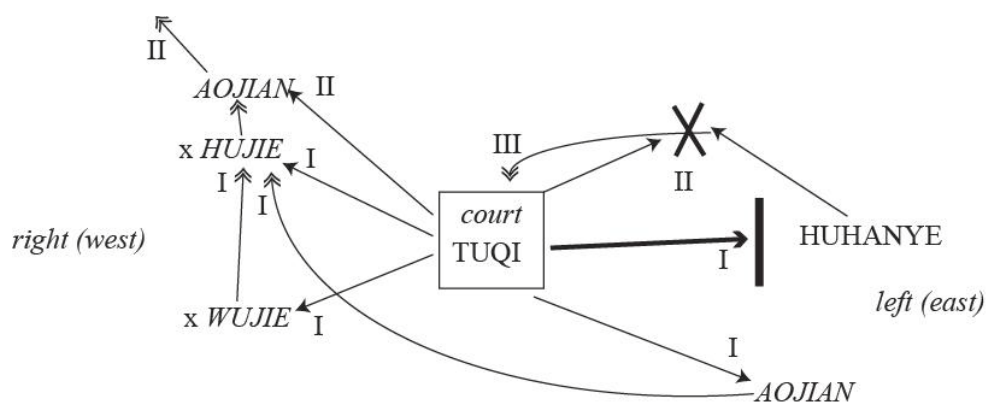


Fig. 4.3 “Five Chanyus” Civil War Period (57-55 BC)

Tuqi possibly came from within the royal clan, but assertions from outside the royal clan soon shook the delicate control this distant claimant held [Fig. 4.3]. While Tuqi built armies in the east against Huhanye, another cohort of conspirators from the west slandered the Wise King of the Right, saying that he planned to set himself up as

Wujie chanyu. Soon after Tuqi had killed the Wise King of the Right along with his father and sons, he discovered the conspirators' deceit and had one of them, the Weili 唯犁 Household Administrator, executed. The other, the Hujie King 呼揭王, fled in fear and set himself up as the Hujie chanyu. Soon after, this named king had made a claim to the position of supreme ruler, the Aojian King of the Right set himself up as the Juli 車犁 chanyu, and the Wujie 烏揭 Household Administrator set himself up as the Wujie chanyu.

Five leaders based in different regions of the Xiongnu realm simultaneously claimed to hold the title of supreme ruler, three of whom were not from the royal clan and one of whom held the relatively low position of household administrator of a named king. Wujie was a group in the west, like Hujie, which came into play several more times during the course of the internal conflict, and Aojian, a group in the east had already proven itself a significant force to stand against the royal lineage. Over the course of several skirmishes with Tuqi chanyu, the Hujie and Wujie claimants rescinded their chanyu titles and joined with the Aojian forces. Even these combined forces were defeated by Tuqi, but they had created enough of a preoccupation for the distant claimant to quickly be defeated by Huhanye. After the defeated Tuqi committed suicide, the Aojian King submitted to the victor Huhanye. Duluqi fled south to submit to the Han, as did Huhanye's Grand General of the Left and his father.

The defection of one of Huhanye's own generals suggests a continued condition of strife in the steppes, and within this Wujie reasserted his claim. He was quickly arrested and beheaded by Huhanye, but another named king, the Xiuxun King 休旬王, attacked the Great Juqu of the Left and went west to set himself up as Runzhen 閼振

chanyu. Soon after, the brother whom Huhanye had raised up as the Luli King of the Left claimed himself Zhizhi 郅支 chanyu. Zhizhi's forces killed Runzhen in battle, and subsequently broke Huhanye's forces. In 51 BC, Huhanye went south, as had many of his high-ranking precedents and some of his own constituents, to submit to the Han. Zhizhi understandably took this as a sign of weakness and that Huhanye, also like his predecessors, would not return to the steppes.

In order to solidify the Xiongnu state, Zhizhi ventured west to pacify the territories of the Right, destroying the younger brother of Tuqi who had claimed himself Yilimu 伊利目 chanyu. However, Huhanye had no intention of relinquishing his claim, and instead began to court the Chinese for support. When Huhanye sent a son to the Han court, so did Zhizhi. His gesture was not answered with the same support as Huhanye's, and he ventured further west to garner support from the Wusun. The western neighbors did not concur and sent the head of Zhizhi's emissary to the Han. Zhizhi repelled an assault from the Wusun and proceeded to subjugate the Jiankun 堅昆 to the west and the Wujie and Dingling to the north, combining their forces with his own and setting up camp in the territory of Wujie far west of the traditional court of the chanyu.

Late Xiongnu (47 BC – 91 AD) 晚匈奴

While Zhizhi exhausted all efforts in the west, Huhanye cultivated his relationship with the Chinese. The venture southward was not initially met with great support among the constituent leaders of Huhanye. All previous chanyus had accepted nothing less than an agreement of equivalency through the *heqin* treaties. All preceding submissions of

tribal leaders had ended in their enfeoffment as frontier marquises or officials of attached states. Submission to the Chinese in any form was considered incompatible with a return to the steppes and the claim of supreme ruler.

呼韓邪議問諸大臣，皆曰：「不可...雖如是而安，何以復長百蠻！」

Huhanye discussed it and asked the various great ministers. And all said, “[You] cannot...Even though [an action] such as this [would lead] then to peace, how could [you] then return to be head of the Hundred Man!”⁴⁷ [HS 94B: 3797]

The crisis of civil war in the steppes brought forth numerous local leaders with apparent strength equal to the royal claimants and thus questioned the sovereignty of the Xiongnu ruling house. Huhanye, as the proclaimed head of the royal lineage and purported sovereign of the steppes, thus sought aid from outside after several years of internal failure. The disaffected ruler found substantial material support from the southern neighbors and recognition of his sovereignty over the steppes for the price of assuming a subservient status beneath the Chinese Son of Heaven.

單于正月朝天子于甘泉宮，漢寵以殊禮，位在諸侯王上，贊謁稱臣而不名。賜以冠帶衣裳，黃金璽，玉具劍，佩刀，弓一張，矢四發，謐戟十，安車一乘，鞍勒一具，馬十五匹，黃金二十斤，錢二十萬，衣被七十七襲，錦繡綺縠雜帛八千匹，絮六千斤。禮畢，使使者道單于先行，宿長平。

The chanyu, for the First Month,⁴⁸ came to the court of the Son of Heaven at Ganquan palace, and the Han bestowed favor with distinguished rituals. [The chanyu’s] position was above the various nobles and kings, and [he] was commended with praise and called a “servant” but was not named. [He] was gifted a cap, belt and garments, a gold [royal] seal with ribbon, a jade ornamented sword, a waist dagger, one bow, four dozen arrows, ten banner spears,⁴⁹ one leisure chariot, a saddle and bridle, fifteen horses, 20 catties of gold, 200,000 cash, 77 sets of clothing, 8000 pieces of brocade, embroidery, woven silk, gauze, and other complex silks, and 6000 catties of raw silk. When the ceremonies had concluded, an emissary was sent to show the chanyu the way proceeding first, and [he] took up residence at Changping. [HS 94B: 3798]

⁴⁷ The name *Man* 蠻 usually denotes foreign groups south of China, but here, and elsewhere, it is used as a word connoting “barbarians” in general. These passages constitute Chinese reconstructions of dialogues, and we should thus understand the choice of words for this expression used to denote all the nomadic groups as employing terms understood by the Chinese readers rather than phrases in the native languages of the nomads.

⁴⁸ New Year ceremonies occurred in the “First Month” (正月), and it is possible these visits were timed to coincide with the season of such celebrations.

⁴⁹ These were traditional spear standards draped with black cloth for the arrival of officials.

The Han officials in attendance all recognized the symbolic significance of not giving Huhanye a name. Though he accepted the status of “servant” to the Son of Heaven, he was placed above all the other Chinese lords, and not given a name of enfeoffment himself. No material or territorial concessions were made by the submitting Xiongnu leader and no steps were taken toward placing him within the direct control of the Chinese empire. Though Zhizhi also sent a son and a series of emissaries to the Chinese court, he never left his stronghold in the west to personally attend the Chinese court, and this may have been one of the critical differences in the eyes of the Han (Yü 1986: 398). During the next few years, Huhanye took up residence in the Han frontier garrisons. In 49 BC, he made another trip to the court of the Han emperor and received the same gifts as before, with an additional 110 sets of clothing, 9000 brocade silks, and 8000 catties of raw silk [*Han shu* 94B: 3798-99].⁵⁰ When the new Han Emperor Yuan 元 ascended, Huhanye sought to ensure the support of the Chinese by making a request of support for his “suffering people.” The Han emperor sent 20,000 bushels (*hu*斛) of grain from the frontier stations of Yunzhong 雲中 and Wuyuan 五原 [*Han shu* 94B: 3800]. By 47 BC, Huhanye, as well as Zhizhi, requested the return of his son, and the Chinese officials at the garrisons recognized the imminent departure of the revitalized Xiongnu ruler.

昌、猛見單于民衆益盛，塞下禽獸盡，單于足以自衛，不畏郅支。聞其大臣多勸單于北歸者，恐北去後難約束，昌、猛即與為盟約曰：「自今以來，漢與匈奴合為一家，世世毋得相詐相攻。有竊盜者，相報，行其誅，償其物；有寇，發兵相助。漢與匈奴敢先背約者，受天不祥。令其世世子孫盡如盟。」昌、猛與單于及大臣俱登匈奴諾水東山，刑白馬，單于以徑路刀金留迺撓酒，以老上單于所破月氏王頭為飲器者共飲血盟。

⁵⁰ Attempts have been made to equate these gifts to modern day monetary amounts and to calculate differences over time from one mission of gifts to the next. We should instead utilize a more cautious approach to these numbers given in the annals and address more qualitative and relative quantitative comparisons.

Chang and Meng saw that the chanyu's people were greatly flourishing, the beasts about the garrison had all gone,⁵¹ and the chanyu was capable enough to fend for himself and did not dread Zhizhi. [They] heard that many of his great ministers had discussed a return move north, and [the Chinese emissaries] feared if [the Xiongnu] left and went north, afterward [they] would be difficult to keep bound up. Chang and Meng thus made up an oath of binding that said, "From now onward, the Han and Xiongnu are as one house, and generation upon generation shall not come to beguile each other or attack each other. When there are [instances] of robbery, they shall recompense each other, accord with their punishment, and compensate their goods. When there is pillaging, they will send troops to help each other. Whether Han or Xiongnu, whoever dares first to break this bond shall receive Heaven's ill will. Now shall their generations upon generations, sons and grandsons, all abide by this agreement." Chang and Meng along with the chanyu as well as the great ministers all ascended the mountain east of the Xiongnu Oath River,⁵² [where] a white horse was killed, the chanyu used a *jingli* knife [to cut] gold and [using] a *liuli* spoon mixed it with alcohol, and then, using the drinking vessel which Lao Shang chanyu had made from the head of the king of the defeated Yuezhi, all drank to the blood oath. [HS 94B: 3801]

The oath was not a *heqin* bilateral agreement as before, but still categorized itself in terms of a familial contract between elements that were "as one house."⁵³ The second clause guaranteed the military support which Huhanye sought, and the first not only protected the Han against incursions, but, more importantly, stipulated for compensations when pillaging did occur. In other words, whether the chanyu was directly responsible or not for raids from his constituents on the Chinese frontier, he was obliged to provide compensation to the Han. There were no guarantees of tribute to the Xiongnu, but the "servant" status of the Xiongnu chanyu to the Chinese Son of Heaven assure abundant gifts of the same type and greater magnitude than the *heqin* treaties. Nevertheless, the treaty which the Han emissaries had sworn with the Xiongnu leader was not accepted at the Han court, and they were asked to return to Huhanye, make sacrifices, and repeal the

⁵¹ In other words, there were no more animals to hunt.

⁵² The date of this Chinese text, despite the original accounts upon which it was based on in the process of compilation, is well over a hundred years after this actual event, and the name of the river ("Xiongnu Oath River") was probably the name this river had gained, and kept, in reference to this momentous event.

⁵³ Psarras (2004: 41) purports the agreement to be "a true *heqin*, bilateral and binding" between the Xiongnu and Han, yet Yü (1986: 398) is cautious in noticing the difference in familial relations, no longer than of equal bothers, but of inferior and superior, in which the Xiongnu are clearly the "servant."

pact. The Xiongnu wisely did not agree to any renegotiations, and this agreement was referred to by Huhanye and his successors for a century to come.

勿解盟。其後呼韓邪竟北歸庭，人衆稍稍歸之，國中遂定。

There was no breaking of the oath. After this, Huhanye chanyu after all went north and returned to court, and the multitudes of people bit by bit returned there, and the state subsequently was stabilized. [*Han shu* 94B: 3801]

Rebuilding the Empire

Huhanye did not return to the Chinese court until 33 BC, a couple years after a Chinese general stationed in the Western Regions launched a devastating surprise attack on Zhizhi in the Kangju 康居 lands and sent his head back to the Chinese court (see Loewe 1974b). After Huhanye's return to the steppes in 47 BC, Zhizhi, even from his far western encampment at Wujie, had begun to fear his brother. In 45 BC, he requested the return of his son from the Han court and made gestures to the Chinese for an agreement equivalent to that which they had given Huhanye. But when the Han envoys arrived, he executed them and induced the enmity of the Chinese. The Kangju to the west of the Wusun extended an invitation to Zhizhi for a combined attack on the Wusun, after which he would be placed as ruler over the Wusun territories. Considering the preceding conflicts between the Xiongnu and the Wusun, the established marital alliance between the Han and the Wusun, and Zhizhi's precarious position in light of the Han support for his rival, he accepted the invitation to attack the Wusun. However, most of his forces perished in the harsh winter conditions en route to the Kangju, and Zhizhi, after many efforts to rebuild a power base in the steppes, was left with a minimal force of several thousand in foreign lands where he was eventually defeated by a combined army of Chinese and local forces.

No accounts describe the actions of Huhanye from the year 47 to 33, except for an excuse of fearing Zhizhi and a pact with the Wusun preventing him from taking the time to return (*Han shu* 94B: 3803, cited in Yü 1986: 396). This conflicts with the narratives given for the years between 51 and 36, which tell of fierce struggles between Zhizhi and the Wusun and the Wusun and Han efforts to stifle his aspirations to rebuild Xiongnu power in the Western Regions.⁵⁴ In this light, then, Huhanye perhaps feared more the Wusun and other neighboring Inner Asian entities, who had made great incursions during the civil war.

Psarras (2004: 41) aptly maintains that the “formal surrender of Huhanye stemmed not from any Xiongnu weakness, but from the political ambitions of this chanyu.” The actions of Huhanye undoubtedly stemmed from internal fissions that splintered the steppe polity, as well as a desire to assert his own personal claim and reassert the claim of the royal lineage, but the civil war clearly resulted in significant diminishment of individual and collective Xiongnu strength, as referenced several times in the texts [*Han shu* 94B: 3796-7]. Zhizhi may not have been the reason, since rumors abounded that Huhanye no longer feared his brother and that Zhizhi instead feared the empowered and returned Huhanye who might launch a distant assault against him [*Han shu* 94B: 3801-2]. The explosion of claims from named kings and distant relatives of the royal line surely posed a problem that the returning ruler faced in order to secure his authority in the steppes, and there no doubt occurred a period of reclaiming his right and ability to rule using the mass of economic support he received from the Han.

⁵⁴ Loewe (1974a) implies that Zhizhi was more an immediate threat to Han interests in the Western Regions than the revitalized Xiongnu state of Huhanye in the Mongolian steppes.

In 33 BC, Huhanye returned to the Han court with full confidence of the supreme position of chanyu and “the gifts were like before with an added amount of clothing, brocades, and raw silk, all more than the times of the Yellow Dragon [i.e. of the previous Han Emperor Xuan]” [*Han shu* 94B: 3803]. In requesting a wife of the Han lineage, however, Emperor Yuan 元 gave the chanyu a woman of the palace family of Wang – the famous Wang Zhaojun 王昭君 who would play a role in Xiongnu politics for several decades and come to be called the Wife for Subduing the Hu (*ninghu yanzhi* 寧胡關氏). The attempt to bring the Xiongnu-Han settlement to a more bilateral status, on par with the previous *heqin* treaties, failed, but the new emboldened chanyu continued his efforts to assert Xiongnu power. Huhanye proposed that he, as the ruler of the Xiongnu, be made the protector of the garrisons from Shanggu westward to Dunhuang, thus relieving the Han people of the burden of managing the frontier. The Han emperor, in respectful language which clearly valued the peaceful, amicable agreement between the two states, declined the proposal [*Han shu* 94B: 3803-5]. The brash requests and increase in gifts, as well as the respectful refusals from the Han, signaled the secure position of the reinstated chanyu.

When Huhanye was on his deathbed, the imperial constituents at his court knew of the fragile situation as well as he. The King of the Hunye, one of the imperial consort clans, was father to the two most prominent of Huhanye’s wives – the Zhuanqu Empress who bore two sons and the Great Empress who bore four sons.⁵⁵ Though the Zhuanqu Empress was the elder, the first two sons of the Great Empress were the eldest of the six.

⁵⁵ Huhanye had more than ten sons by other wives [*Han shu* 94B: 3807].

The narrative in the *Han shu* recites a conversation between the two wives and the dying chanyu, though the sentiments probably more generally reflected those of the heads of imperial clans and the royal lineage who had only recently reasserted power in the steppes. When Huhanye supposedly suggested that Jumoju 且莫車, the eldest son of the Zhuanqu Empress, become the next chanyu, the Zhuanqu Empress proposed placing the older two sons of her sister before her own, allegedly in the interests of the state.

其母顓渠閼氏曰：「匈奴亂十餘年，不絕如髮，賴蒙漢力，故得復安。今平定未久，人民創艾戰鬪，且莫車年少，百姓未附，恐復危國。我與大閼氏一家共子，不如立雕陶莫皋。」大閼氏曰：「且莫車雖少，大臣共持國事，今舍貴立賤，後世必亂。」單于卒從顓渠閼氏計，立雕陶莫皋，約令傳國與弟。呼韓邪死，雕陶莫皋立，為復株累若鞮單于。

His mother the Zhuanqu Empress said, “The Xiongnu were in chaos for more than ten years, unending like [strands of] hair, relying on and bearing Han strength, thus to achieve a return to peace. The present level stability has not been long, and the people’s wounds have [just] ceased [from] warring and fighting. Jumoju is few in years, and the hundred families have not yet adhered and fear a return to peril for the state. The Great Empress and I are of one house and children of the same [rearing]. Would it not be [best] to establish Diaotaomogao?” The Great Empress said, “Jumoju is nevertheless young, [and if] the great chiefs collectively handle the state affairs, and now abandon the noble and establish the lowly, later generations will certainly [fall into] chaos.” The chanyu in the end followed the plan of the Zhuanqu Empress, establishing Diaotaomogao, and made a binding command to turn the state over to the younger brothers. When Huhanye died, Diaotaomogao was established as Fuzhulei ruodi chanyu. [*Han shu* 94B: 3807]

This passage clearly expresses the greatest fear of the peril of the state in the minds of the imperial nobles at court – the slighting of power in the hands of the privileged aristocratic families in favor of the numerous other nominal clans and their chiefs. The principal issue of the civil war, according to this narrative, was the splintering among the core governing nobles which opened the paths for claims from the “lowly” other chiefs. Whether a plan conceived by the two empresses, Huhanye himself, or the collective royal members gathered at court, the dying chanyu decreed a clear command for an uninterrupted line of lateral succession beginning with the eldest of all his sons. The line of sons lasted a century before it came into question [Fig. 4.4].

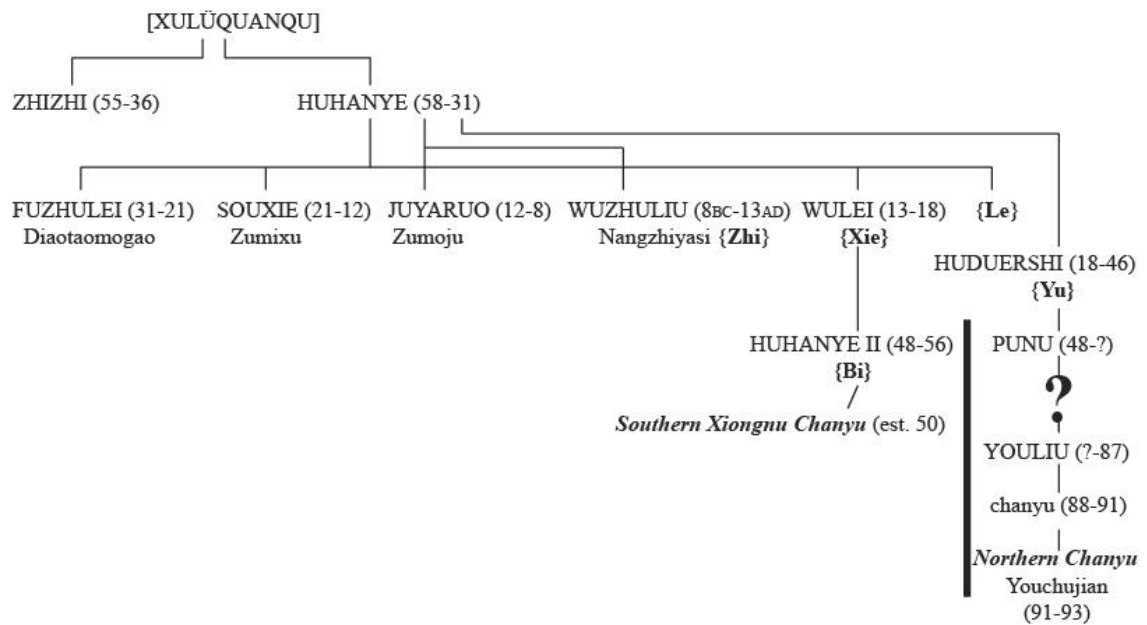


Fig. 4.4 Late Xiongnu Successions

Numerous treatments of Xiongnu history have misread the accounts of the middle first century BC and interpreted this period as the beginning of the end of Xiongnu hegemony. Yü (1990: 141-2) argues that the “cohesive solidarity which had characterized the Xiongnu empire under Modun, Laoshang and Junchen was lost forever.” This assertion raises the question of how solid the political structure of the empire under these second century BC rulers had actually been. The civil war is often treated as an irreparable split with only a brief period of reunited strength afterward (Sneath 2007: 23). Some go so far as to equate the conflict between Huhanye and Zhizhi as a division into “two separate Xiongnu kingdoms of Inner Mongolia and Outer Mongolia” (Yü 1990: 139), and others anachronistically apply the label of Southern Xiongnu to Huhanye

(Psarras 2003, 2004).⁵⁶ If one were to apply a directional division to the schism of Huhanye and Zhizhi, it would more likely represent an eastern Han contingent and a western Wusun/Kangju contingent, not a southern against northern division as it occurred a century later. The more important distinction between Huhanye and the later Southern chanyu, lies in the character and results of their submissions to the Chinese court. Huhanye did not establish a southern Xiongnu state in northern China. He resided in a frontier garrison for a handful of years before returning north as the alleged sole ruler of the steppes.

Historical studies repeatedly construct a trajectory with Xiongnu hegemony progressing through a single peak during the second century BC, a plummet in the first century BC, and a century and a half of minimal strength, treating events of obvious strength as brief moments. Through a collection of references to steppe politics and a series of interactions with the Chinese during the mid first century BC to mid first century AD, I will argue that the Xiongnu imperial lineages reinstated authority during these hundred years to a level at least comparable to, if not greater than, the Xiongnu empire of the second century BC.

The New Regime

The command for continued lateral succession after Huhanye was immediately honored by the new chanyu Fuzhulei 復株絁 when he set up the subsequent three sons of Huhanye as the Wise King of the Left, Luli King of the Left, and Wise King of the Right,

⁵⁶ The Southern Xiongnu are not established as a political entity by that name until the mid first century AD, and nowhere in the *Han shu* do the narrators use this proper name to refer to Huhanye or his successors of the following hundred years. The phenomenon of the Southern Xiongnu will be discussed in detail below.

matching age to relative rank [*Han shu* 94B: 3807]. The subsequent four chanyus succeeded in the proper order, each raising the next brother of the high six to the position of Wise King of the Left. When Fuzhulei became chanyu, he also married, in accordance with Xiongnu custom, the wife of his predecessor, the Chinese noble bride Wang Zhaojun. She gave birth to two daughters by him who were married off as princesses to the Xubu and Dangyu 當于 clans [*Han shu* 94B: 3807-8]. The former is mentioned as one of the imperial consort clans, and we can only assume that the latter had also, by that time, risen to be one of the privileged aristocratic families of the empire. Clear orders of succession and the solidification of ties within the noble clans became a strong foundation for the reestablished Xiongnu regime.

In foreign affairs, the new Xiongnu rulers had not obtained royal princesses and a formal *heqin* agreement like those of the second century BC, and instead succumbed to a “servant” status in diplomatic relations with the Chinese. An additional title was given to the chanyus to intimate them with the Han, or at least the accounts tell us so. As the Han posthumously referred to their emperors as “filial,” so did the Xiongnu, beginning with Huhanye, give their rulers the additional title of “ruodi” 若鞮, the Xiongnu word for filial [*Han shu* 94B: 3828-9]. The chanyu Wuzhuliu 烏珠留 (8 BC-13 AD) went so far as to agree to change his given name of Nangzhiyasi 囊知牙斯 to a single character Chinese style name of Zhi 知 [*Han shu* 94B: 3819].⁵⁷ De Crespigny (1984: 200) is probably

⁵⁷ This change may not have been drastic, since the two youngest sons of the Great Empress had single character Chinese style names – Xian 咸 and Le 樂. The appearance of other single character names for royal sons – including Deng 登, Zhu 助, Yu 與, and Bi 比 – reflects the use of Chinese style names in the Han accounts to refer to them, perhaps indicating a more widespread adoption or addition of such foreign style appellations by some of the Xiongnu royal élite.

correct in assuming that this Chinese name was not recognized among the Xiongnu. The issue of the name may serve as a microcosm of the diplomatic policies of the new Xiongnu regime. They chose to appease the Chinese with whatever language became necessary, in exchange for a peaceful southern frontier and a steady increase in gifts to the court of the chanyu.

Yü (1967, 1986) draws attention to a quantifiable increase in the gifts bestowed upon the chanyus during their tribute missions to the Han court – for example, from 8000 bolts of raw silk in 51 BC to 30,000 bolts in 1 BC. The amounts given for the chanyu missions of 51, 49, 33, 25 and 1 BC were surely not the only bequests sent to the Xiongnu court, and most likely represent snapshots of many, perhaps yearly, gifts sent to the Xiongnu over the years. A request of the Han made during the reign of Emperor Wu was the ceding of the son of the Xiongnu ruler to the Chinese court as an heir apparent hostage for diplomatic purposes. Huhanye began his negotiations with the Chinese by sending his son to court, even though he was later requested sent back. When Fuzhulei ascended, he immediately sent his son to the Han court, as did his subsequent younger brothers with their sons when they ascended to the position of supreme chanyu. Though seemingly conceding to the Chinese request for the Xiongnu heir apparent, the new line of chanyus avoided such a forfeit since the lateral succession dictated that it was not the son but the younger brother who was the heir apparent named to the position of Wise King of the Left. The significance of the diplomatic hostage was thus significantly reduced.

The chanyus immediately sent a son to the Chinese upon each of their accessions, but in every case delayed a personal visit to the Han court for several years. Two of the

chanyus, Souxie 搜諧 (21-12 BC) and Juya 車牙 (12-8 BC), died before a journey was made, though preparations were underway in both cases. The immediate conveyance of a son to appease the Han appeared sufficient to the chanyus, leaving them to attend to other internal affairs while personal visits remained a secondary undertaking. The postponement of chanyu missions does not necessarily correlate to a delay of the procurement of gifts from China. We may assume that gifts were already coming to the chanyu via emissary missions, including the ones which delivered the Xiongnu royal sons. The early years of each new Xiongnu ruler, who assumed relations with the Han remained stable, likely engaged the chanyu in efforts to reassure his authority and secure power within the steppes.

Several events narrated in Xiongnu foreign affairs attest the strength of this new regime that must have resulted from internal efforts for which there remain little or no narration. Early in the reign of Wuzhuliu, a Han general and uncle of the emperor, put forth a request to the Xiongnu chanyu for a small bit of border land which supposedly “entered” the Han territories at Zhangye and contained a particular wood and falcon feathers prime for arrows. The bold request, when stated to the chanyu, did not speak of its valued resources which the Chinese desired, only of a supposed relief to border patrols of the Han if it were relinquished to them.

單于曰：「孝宣、孝元皇帝哀憐父呼韓邪單于，從長城以北匈奴有之。此溫偶駱王所居地也，未曉其形狀所生，請遣使問之。」藩、容歸漢。後復使匈奴，至則求地。單于曰：「父兄傳五世，漢不求此地，至知獨求，何也？已問溫偶駱王，匈奴西邊諸侯作穹廬及車，皆仰此山材木，且先父地，不敢失也。」

The chanyu said, “The Filial Xuan and Filial Yuan August Emperors had compassion and sympathy for Huhanye chanyu, and it followed that [all] north of the Long Wall, the Xiongnu had possession of this. This is the land in which the Wen’outu King resides, and [I] do not yet know the condition under which it [came] to be. [I] request [to be able to] dispatch an emissary to inquire about it.” Fan and Rong returned to Han. Afterward, [they] were sent to the Xiongnu, and arrived thus requesting the land. The chanyu said, “Fathers

and brothers have handed [it] over for five generations. The Han [can] not request this land. It comes to [me], Zhi,⁵⁸ [who] alone [can] make a request. What is this? Already have [I] asked the Wen'outu King, and the Xiongnu various marquises⁵⁹ of the western frontier [for] making domed huts and carts all utilize this mountain timber. Furthermore it is the land of forefathers, and [we] do not dare discard it." [*Han shu* 94B: 3810]

The Xiongnu chanyu, not surprisingly, refused the request. Wuzhuliu first cited the agreement with Huhanye which the previous Han emperors Xuan and Yuan had, in their benevolence, honored. The division of realms along the lines of the Great Wall echoes that which was dictated by the early Xiongnu chanyu Jiyu in 174 BC [*Shiji* 110: 2902], and an allusion to that period of Xiongnu hegemony and supreme sovereignty was surely intended. Beyond the stipulations of an agreement with the Han, the Xiongnu claimed it to be ancestral lands reaching five generations back. A territorial assertion of hereditary rights to land seems clear here as well. They also valued it for the timber resources and probably for the pastures within which the Wen'outu King 溫偶駱王 and his constituents could migrate. The question of sovereignty remained the most critical complaint, and the one which raised the irritated question in regard to the request of the Chinese general: "What is this?" The Han had no right to request this land from the Wen'outu king. Only the Xiongnu chanyu retained the right to demand such territory. The general was supposedly punished by the Han emperor for having made such an outrageous request on his behalf.

Strength in the face of neighboring powers also came to the fore in the Xiongnu interactions with groups to the east and west. In 5 BC, the Wusun plundered the Xiongnu

⁵⁸ As mentioned above, Zhi was the name that Wuzhuliu chanyu used in correspondences with the Han.

⁵⁹ A commentator's note equates these "various marquises" to the more commonly used term for the Xiongnu named chiefs, the "petty kings" (*xiao wang* 小王) [*Han shu* 94B: 3811]. Regardless of the Chinese terminology used, this is clearly a reference to the local tribal leaders.

western frontier, taking livestock and killing people. The Xiongnu retaliated, killing many of the Wusun and driving off livestock. After this substantial loss, the Wusun sent a hostage son to the Xiongnu out of fear. The Han demanded the return of the hostage son to the Wusun, since, in their world view, the two foreign “servants” of the Han could not engage in independent diplomatic relations of such magnitude [*Han shu* 94B: 3811]. The message had nevertheless been sent to the Xiongnu – they were undeniably more powerful than their western neighbors who only a few decades before had dealt the Xiongnu deadly blows.

By the time of Emperor Yuan, the Han had set up a colony in the Western Regions at Jushi, and there was henceforth a Former and Later Jushi King. About 1 BC, conflicts arose for the Later Jushi King 車師後王 named Gougu 句姑⁶⁰ and a Han-established king⁶¹ named Tang Dou 唐兜 against the Han Protector General of the Western Regions and the forces at the Han fort of Yumen Pass 玉門關. In their frustration, Gougu and Tang Dou led their families and people away and submitted to the Xiongnu, who set them up in the lands of the Luli King of the Left. The chanyu then sent a letter to the Han, saying “Your Servant has respectfully received them” (臣謹已受). A large delegation was sent from the Han to inform the chanyu that the Western Regions were subsumed within the realm of the Han and he could thus not receive them and should send them back. This raised the question of the extent of their respective realms, and the

⁶⁰ The name was written here as Gougu 句姑, though in the Biography of the Western Regions it appears as Gugou 姑句. This undoubtedly denotes the same transcribed foreign name.

⁶¹ His title was Departing Hu to Come King 去胡來王. It was purposefully constructed by the Chinese to reference the separation from the Hu, or Xiongnu, and coming to submit to the Han.

chanyu again referred to the agreement of Huhanye with the previous Xuan and Yuan Han emperors [*Han shu* 94B: 3818, 96B: 3924-5].

A problem had arisen with the agreement contingent on the line of the Great Wall in an area westward past the end of the Great Wall. The Chinese insisted “the Western Regions are subsumed within [the Han]” (西域内屬)⁶², and the chanyu maintained that while he would hold to the agreement of not receiving any defectors from the Han empire south of the Great Wall “this was an outer state and [the Xiongnu] can receive them” (此外國也得受之) [*Han shu* 94B: 3818]. The Han persisted and the Xiongnu eventually returned the defectors who were subsequently beheaded. Immediately after, Four Articles (*sitiao* 四條) were drafted in order to redefine the questions of imperial realms and actions of the Xiongnu with so-called outer states. Any defectors who might submit to the Xiongnu from (1) China (2) the Wusun (3) Western Regions states with ribbon seals (*yinshou* 印綬) of the Han, or (4) the Wuhuan could not be received by the Xiongnu. When the Han envoys delivered the articles to the chanyu as a contained document, he returned the container with the pact which had been made with Emperor Xuan [*Han shu* 94B: 3819]. The articles were meant to trump the pact of Huhanye which the Xiongnu continually cited, and the chanyu made his refusal clear. Despite the return of the Chinese appointed leaders of Jushi, this incident underscores the recognized authority which the Xiongnu had regained among the groups outside China.

⁶² This view reflected the more assertive concepts of the Chinese world view which extended “All under Heaven” to all the known regions of the world, especially those which had formally made gestures of subservience to the Han.

A subsequent ploy by the Han encouraged the Wuhuan, on the basis of the new Four Articles, to cease sending tribute to the Xiongnu. The result of the incident nevertheless divulges the subservient status of the Wuhuan by the new Xiongnu regime. The Wuhuan attempted to rebel against and capture the Xiongnu emissaries who came to collect tribute, but this resulted in a Xiongnu assault that sent the Wuhuan fleeing into the mountains. The Xiongnu made off with hordes of hostages and demanded a mission from the Wuhuan with more tribute of horses, livestock, hides and cloth in exchange. When the apologetic Wuhuan mission of two thousand arrived, the Xiongnu kept these along with the previous hostages [*Han shu* 94B: 3820]. A powerful message had thus been sent to the eastern groups, reasserting the Xiongnu as the supreme power over the steppes capable of making demands of the various Inner Asian groups, not the Han. The chanyus appear to have been willing to make certain allowances in individual incidents, such as the return of hostages to Han allies, perhaps as conciliatory gestures. They used the proper self address of “your servant” (*chen*) in correspondences with the Han emperor, and Wuzhuliu chanyu even accepted the change to a Chinese style name when speaking with the Chinese. The new Xiongnu regime nevertheless stood fast to the oath which Huhanye took on the mountain with the Han emissaries, whether or not the Han ruler had ever officially consented to the exact terms.

When the Chinese usurper Wang Mang 王莽 declared his New Dynasty 新代 in 9 AD, the Xiongnu immediately faced new challenges to their authority. He attempted to subvert the sovereignty of the Xiongnu chanyu in subtle diplomatic language, which

while seeming to say “the new seal of the Xiongnu chanyu” actually announced the “seal of Xiongnu chanyu of (i.e. under) the New Dynasty.”

故印文曰「匈奴單于璽」，莽更曰「新匈奴單于章」

The old seal inscription said “The seal of the Xiongnu chanyu” and Mang changed it to say “The New Xiongnu chanyu seal.” [*Han shu* 94B: 3820]⁶³

明日，單于果遣右骨都侯當白將率曰：「漢賜單于印，言『璽』不言『章』，又無『漢』字，諸王已下乃有『漢』言『章』。今(印)[即]去『璽』加『新』，與臣下無別。願得故印。」

The next day, the chanyu as a result [of this discovery] dispatched the Gudu Marquis Dang to inform the generals and commanders saying, “The seal which the Han had gifted the chanyu [bore] the word ‘xi-seal’ not the word ‘zhang-seal,’ it did not have the [Chinese dynastic] character of Han, and it is the various kings and below which have [the character] ‘Han’ and the word ‘zhang-seal.’ Now the seal has discarded ‘xi-seal’ and added [the dynastic character of] ‘New,’ [and thus] there is no separation [of the chanyu] from the ministers and below. [We] would like to get the old seal.” [*Han shu* 94B: 3821]

The chanyu sent emissaries south, accepting the Chinese gifts but simultaneously requesting a replacement of a seal similar to the old version. A further demand was made for the Xiongnu to not receive submissions from the Wuhuan when a great number of them were discovered residing in Xiongnu territory,⁶⁴ and later the Han Protector General executed a Jushi Later King who attempted to submit to the Xiongnu [*Han shu* 94B: 3822]. Despite seemingly acquiescent actions in response to Chinese commands, the Xiongnu continued to receive tributary missions and defecting envoys of leaders.

After the Jushi Later King was killed, his brother fled with over 2000 people and drove off with livestock to surrender to the Xiongnu, and the chanyu received them. Furthermore, the brother returned with a force of Xiongnu to pillage and attack Jushi, injured the Protector General, and then returned to the Xiongnu. The chanyu blatantly disregarded the Four Articles, which he had never accepted, by not only receiving the

⁶³ Three words for “seal” are given here and in the following passage. *Yin* (印) is the general word for stamping seals, *xi* (璽) denotes the exclusive seal of an emperor, and *zhang* (章) is the seal of an official.

⁶⁴ These numerous Wuhuan people were seen in the camp of Xian, who then had to take the matter up with the chanyu before escorting the Wuhuan away.

Jushi defectors but also supporting them in a raid of retribution against the Han representatives in the Western Regions. These events eventually led to a complete revolt of the Western Regions against the Chinese and in favor of the Xiongnu, and Wang Mang responded by opening an invitation to establish fifteen new chanyus to divide and rule the Xiongnu.

In 11 AD, Wang Mang sent emissaries to Yunzhong to welcome any descendants of Huhanye, and Xian咸, the fifth son of Huhanye, came south with his two sons Deng登 and Zhu助. When Wuzhuliu, the fourth son of Huhanye, became chanyu he appointed two of his younger brothers to the positions of Left and Right Wise Kings, as had his preceding older brothers. However, he skipped over Xian and appointed Le樂, the sixth son, to the heir apparent position of Wise King of the Left and Yu與, an older son of the fifth consort, as the Wise King of the Right. When Le died, Wuzhuliu again passed over Xian to appoint his own eldest son to the position of heir apparent. Xian was given a lowly appointment as a petty king – the Lihan King of the Left左犁汗王.⁶⁵ The sole disaffected royal son of Huhanye then took up the title of Filial Chanyu 孝單于 given by Wang Mang, and he was bestowed with “a leisure chariot and a war chariot, 1000 catties of gold, 1000 pieces of complex silks, and ten banner halberds” (安車鼓車各一，黃金千斤，雜繒千匹，戲戟十) [*Han shu* 94B: 3823]. These gifts intentionally imitated those which were given to Huhanye upon his submission to the Han. Zhu was given 500 catties of gold and the title of Obedient Chanyu 順單于, and he and his brother were both

⁶⁵ At the time of Xian’s acceptance of Wang Mang’s chanyu title, he is referred to as the Lihan King of the Right. Whether a transcription error in the texts or an actual change in position, it was nevertheless the position of a petty king.

taken to the Chinese court at Chang'an. Had such an orchestration been made after the death of Wuyanqudi in 58 BC, the result may have been catastrophic for the Xiongnu state. The minimal effect of the splintering effort on the Xiongnu state and its ruling élite demonstrates the fortitude of the royal clan and its authority in the steppes.

單于聞之，怒曰：「先單于受漢宣帝恩，不可負也。今天子非宣帝子孫，何以得立？」遣左骨都侯、右伊秩訾王呼盧訾及左賢王樂將兵入雲中益壽塞，大殺吏民。

The chanyu heard this and was angry, saying, "The former chanyu [Huhanye] received the grace of the Han Emperor Xuan. [You] cannot betray [this]. The Son of Heaven now is not the son or grandson of Emperor Xuan, so how could he be established?" [The chanyu] dispatched the Gudu Marquis of the Left, the Yizhizi King of the Right Huluzi, and the Wise King of the Left Le [who] led troops and invaded the Yishou garrison at Yunzhong, greatly massacring the petty officials and people. [*Han shu* 94B: 3823]

是後，單于歷告左右部都尉、諸邊王，入塞寇盜，大輩萬餘，中輩數千，少者數百，殺鴈門、朔方太守、都尉，略吏民畜產不可勝數，緣邊虛耗。

After this, the chanyu further encouraged the Left and Right Commandants, and other various frontier kings to invade the garrisons and plunder and rob. The greater kind [of incursions] were over 10,000 [men], the middle kind were several thousand, and the smaller ones were several hundred, killing the Yanmen and Shuofang Protectorates and Commandants, and absconded the petty officials, people, and livestock. [They] could not win but several [times] and the peripheries were emptied. [*Han shu* 94B: 3824]

Wang Mang then, against the advice from his ministers, emptied the treasury and launched an all out assault in several columns against the Xiongnu. The attacks failed and the Xiongnu continued to raid the frontier. Xian had only just been appointed the Filial Chanyu of the New Dynasty, when he fled north, returning to the court of the chanyu and reporting all he had seen. He was not punished by Wuzhuliu for his defection, but was placed in an even more lowly position, as Marquis of Grain Stores 粟置支侯 – a petty office, not a noble title, and one which likely meant he stayed at court. When Wang Mang heard of this defection and the role of one of Xian's sons in the raids, he publicly executed Xian's son Deng, who was still at the Chinese court.⁶⁶ The subsequent narratives in the Chinese records provide a grim description of the frontier, utterly

⁶⁶ By this time, Zhu had died of illness and Deng had been raised to the title of Obedient Chanyu.

destroyed by Xiongnu raids and the campaigns of Wang Mang. These accounts were likely exaggerated by the scribes of the later reinstated Han Dynasty for the purposes of criticizing the usurper Wang Mang, but they nevertheless attest to the resilience of the Xiongnu to resist attempts to splinter the ruling clans and repel military assaults from China.

At the time of Wuzhuliu's death in 13 AD, the affairs of the Xiongnu were managed chiefly by the Gudu Marquis of the Right named Xubu Dang 須卜當 – a member of the Xubu imperial clan and husband of the Yimo Princess 伊墨居次 named Yun 云, daughter of the famous Chinese bride Wang Zhaojun. Yun greatly desired *heqin* ties with China and had close relations with Xian both before and after his obeisance to the New Dynasty. As a result, the position of chanyu passed over Yu, the Wise King of the Right, and came favorably to Xian [*Han shu* 94B: 3826-7]. This was at least the reason given in the Chinese accounts. It is also possible that Xian still held favor among the Xiongnu aristocracy, and he was, after all the fifth son and rightful heir in the succession line commanded by Huhanye, even though Yu was older. When Xian was established as the chanyu Wulei 烏累, his younger brother Le had already passed away, and so none of the six original brothers remained.⁶⁷ Wulei raised his previously favored brother Yu to the rank of Luli King of the Left, a different younger brother, son of the Tuqi Empress 屠耆闕氏, to the rank of Wise King of the Right, and one of Wuzhuliu's sons to the ranks of Wise King of the Left. The designation of Wuzhuliu's son, Bi 比, as

⁶⁷ During the reign of Wuzhuliu, Le and several subsequent Wise Kings of the Left had died suddenly, and at that time the title name was considered inauspicious. The name was changed to Protectorate (*huyu* 護于), yet the position still denoted the heir apparent [*Han shu* 94B: 3827].

heir apparent had angered Xian in the years before his ascension as Wulei chanyu, and he thus demoted Bi to the position of Left Tuqi King 左屠耆王.

Wang Mang sent emissaries north with gifts – gold, clothing, embroideries and brocades – to congratulate the new chanyu, probably hoping that he could finagle a more favorable relationship with the son of Huhanye who had, for a time, been a chanyu under the New Dynasty. The emissaries of course lied and said that his son Deng was still alive at the Chinese court. But when Wulei received news of his son’s previous execution, he launched rapacious pillaging incursions along the Chinese frontier, while all the while claiming it was a rogue Xiongnu contingent who had allied with the Wuhuan. In 15 AD, Wang Mang sent an apologetic mission to return Deng’s body.

咸等至，多遺單于金珍，因論說改其號，號匈奴曰「恭奴」，單于曰「善于」，賜印綬。…單于貪莽金幣，故曲聽之，然寇盜如故。

When [Wang] Xian and the other [Chinese emissaries] reached [the garrison], much was bestowed upon the chanyu in gold and treasures, and in accordance with an edict [they] reported of a change to be made to his title. The name of Xiongnu was to be said as “Gongnu” (Respectful Slaves) and Chanyu said as “Shanyu” (Adept One) and gifted him a seal with a ribbon⁶⁸ ...The chanyu coveted the gold and coins of Mang, so thus in a crooked manner listened to him, but really plundered and robbed as before. [*Han shu* 94B: 3828]

The version of the story given elsewhere in the *Han shu* middle chapter on Wang Mang [99B: 4121] gives very different, and much more demeaning, replacement names. Instead, the new names are “Xiangnu” 降奴 (Submitted Slaves) and “Fuyu” 服于 (Surrendered One). This stark difference in the narratives, between respectful names and those denoting submission, is difficult to reconcile, but may represent a case when the Chinese attempted to exploit the characters of their writing toward a propagandistic trick. In such a case, the latter more degrading names would seem more to have been the case.

⁶⁸ Here, only the general word for “seal” is given (*yin*), though it was likely still not one inscribed as an imperial seal.

This is corroborated by the presence of both these verbs – “submit” (*xiang* 降) and “surrender” (*fu* 服) – seen in four character phrases on circular roof end tiles, dated to the late Western Han, scattered among the remains of tomb mound structures in the northern periphery areas of the garrisons (Che 2000), exactly where the Xiongnu came to pay their respects and conduct diplomatic missions. The phrases include: “the chanyu is made to submit by Heaven” (單于天降) and “the four barbarians completely surrender” (四夷盡服), the four barbarians being those in all four directions or those from every corner of the world.

Wulei died in his fifth year of rule, and, in 18 AD, his younger half-brother Yu, was raised to the supreme position and called the *ruodi daogao* chanyu Huduershi 呼都而尸.⁶⁹ The following year, the new chanyu sent a mission of his close royal relatives and in-laws to bring tribute gifts to the Chinese and meet at the frontier garrisons. Wang Mang quickly had Xubu Dang and the princes Yun taken captive back to Chang’an, and then established Dang as the Xubu Chanyu in hopes of raising him as the new Xiongnu supreme ruler. Wang Mang clearly misunderstood the contemporary dynamics of the Xiongnu aristocracy and imperial clans. When Xubu Dang had managed affairs during the transition from Wuzhuliu to Wulei, he had never attempted to raise himself or someone from his family as chanyu. This would have qualified as an unacceptable nomination from a consort clan. The Xiongnu then raided the frontier in retaliation for the brash claim, and during this time Dang fell ill and died.

⁶⁹ The label *ruodi* (filial) had been one all previous chanyus since Huhanye had attached, but the label *daogao* 道皋 is of unknown meaning.

In 24 AD, amid internal stress resulting from the radical reforms and policies of the New Dynasty, rebels stormed the Chinese capital and killed the usurper Wang Mang. China fell into a period of virtual civil war. Soon after, a member of the original royal Han line raised himself as Emperor Gengshi 更始 of the reinstated Han Dynasty.

更始二年冬，漢遣中郎將歸德侯颯、大司馬護軍陳遵使匈奴，授單于漢舊制璽綬，王侯以下印綬，因送云、當餘親屬貴人從者。單于輿驕，謂遵、颯曰：「匈奴本與漢為兄弟，匈奴中亂，孝宣皇帝輔立呼韓邪單于，故稱臣以尊漢。今漢亦大亂，為王莽所篡，匈奴亦出兵擊莽，空其邊境，令天下騷動思漢，莽卒以敗而漢復興，亦我力也，當復尊我！」

In the winter of the second year of the Gengshi [emperor], the Han dispatched the Inner Gentleman General Marquis of Virtuous Submission, Sa, and the Great Commander of the Protectorate Army, Chen Zun, as emissaries to the Xiongnu to award the chanyu with the old Han system [imperial] seal with ribbon, [and to] the kings, marquises and below seals with ribbons, and accordingly sent back the noble relatives of Yun and Dang [who had been retained by Wang Mang]. The chanyu Yu [i.e. Huduershi] haughtily proclaimed to Zun and Sa, “The Xiongnu were originally considered brethren with the Han. Then the Xiongnu [fell] in the midst of chaos, and the filial Emperor Xuan assisted in establishing Huhanye chanyu, [who] thus was called “servant” in respect to the Han. Now the Han also is in great chaos, from the usurpation of Wang Mang, and the Xiongnu also went out with troops to attack Mang, emptying the frontier garrisons, causing disturbance in All Under Heaven⁷⁰ and arousing intentions for the Han. Mang has died and been defeated, and hence the Han have returned to prosperity. [This] also was [from] our strength, and so should [the Han] return with reverence for us!” [*Han shu* 94B: 3829]

The Gengshi Emperor did not agree to these terms, but he soon fell to the Red Eyebrow rebels and was later replaced by another restorer of the Han Dynasty – the Han Emperor Guangwu 漢光武帝 – who was much more conciliatory to the Xiongnu demands. He did not, however, finish the task of quelling all the rebellious portions of the Chinese empire and establishing his constituents until the straggling years of 34 – 39 AD. The chanyu Huduershi reigned for many years, from 18 to 46 AD, making incursions as far as the Wei River valley, and expanding the Xiongnu realm to proportions comparable to that of the empire under Modun (de Crespigny 1984: 227).

⁷⁰ The phrase “All Under Heaven” (天下) refers here to all the lands within the Chinese realm.

Crises of the Late Xiongnu

The first of two major crises struck the Xiongnu empire upon the death of Huduershi in 46 AD. Through the successions of the previous few chanyus, some tension had developed among the possible sons and brothers who could claim the title of supreme ruler. Xian had been passed over several times before he eventually achieved the status as Wulei chanyu. The son of Wuzhuliu who had been designated heir apparent, Bi, was demoted by Xian to the rank of a petty king, elevated though still discounted at the accession of Yu as Huduershi, passed over by Yu's eldest and short-lived son, and lastly overlooked in favor of the next son of Yu, who became the chanyu Punu 蒲奴. The disaffected royal son surely worried as the exact route of fraternal succession dictated by Huhanye encountered problems and challenges. Competition had resurfaced, even to the extent of Huduershi killing his own half brother Yituzhiyashi 伊屠智牙師 after his accession.

As a Chinese mission passed though on a visit to the court of the new chanyu, Bi offered a map of the Xiongnu territory to the Han envoys as a gesture of allegiance. When his treachery was discovered, Punu chanyu sent a punitive army which was summarily repelled. Bi then moved south with a few divisions (*bu* 部) to the Ordos region of the Yellow River and eventually the area called West of the River. In 48, and again in 50, he was established as a chanyu by the Han court, who settled him permanently in the region with an entourage of Han officials to oversee the new Han-established chanyu. Bi took on the name Huhanye with obvious deference for the Xiongnu ruler who had submitted a hundred years prior, and in hopes of receiving the

same degree of support. However, neither Bi nor his immediate successors returned north. The newly established Xiongnu state remained a southern entity, entrenched within the Chinese frontier and guarded by the Chinese official named the Xiongnu Inner Gentleman General 匈奴中郎將 and his associates.

The handful of years following the death of Huduershi can hardly be categorized as a civil war. Widespread warfare did not escalate across vast portions of the empire, the peripheries were not threatened by surrounding groups preying on a splintered state, and the skirmishes between the two contenders appear short lived during the few years of Bi's establishment as the Southern Xiongnu chanyu named Huhanye. More importantly, the arguments remained between rightful royal claimants to the position of supreme ruler, all of whom had been immediate sons or brothers of the previous chanyus. Chiefs of the consort clans and named kings staked no claim. In fact, named kings of outside clans or families seem to have faded from positions of privilege and power. The majority of kings mentioned were members of the royal lineage – brothers and sons established in those positions by the chanyus. Additionally, the lower kings almost always bore a divisional descriptor of left or right, whereas such named kings of the early Xiongnu were rarely divided in this manner. The local kings, or tribal chiefs as the case may be, appear to have been more splintered and often infiltrated by direct appointees from the imperial aristocracy.

Though an apparent stalemate was reached between the Southern Xiongnu and their northern neighbors, we do not know the exact difference in size of forces nor can we assume an equal division of territory (de Crespigny 1984: 246). While an entire chapter is

dedicated to the Southern Xiongnu in the *Hou Han shu*, no parallel chapter for the other Xiongnu entity appears. We thus have come to know much more about the actions, events, and structure of the Southern Xiongnu, leaving their northern neighbors more indistinct than before. A few scant events find narration in the biographies of the Later Han emperors, which evidence significant raids by the Xiongnu throughout the reigns of the Han emperors Guangwu (25-57) and Ming (57-75). The biographies of the Western Regions and the Han representatives involved in the politics and campaigns there also attest to the continued presence or threat of the Xiongnu through most of the first century AD.

The Chinese texts account for the beginning of the reign of Punu chanyu at 46, yet no end date is provided and no names of northern Xiongnu rulers are provided until the narratives tell that a chanyu named Youliu 優留 died in 87. The Xiongnu in the northern steppes after 50 AD are referred to throughout the chapters of the *Hou Han shu* as the Northern Xiongnu, so as to differentiate them from the Southern Xiongnu entity at hand, but this should not be mistaken for a nomenclature accepted by the Xiongnu entity in the steppes after Huduershi. Not until 91, did a chanyu in the north settle far from central Mongolia in the Hami region and accept a former title of Northern Chanyu denoting a parallel submissive state like the Southern Xiongnu established with Bi.

After more than a decade of campaigns launched by the Han against the Xiongnu in the steppes, the Han and Southern Xiongnu forces were joined by simultaneous attacks from the Xianbei at the Left, the Western Regions at the Right, and the Dingling from the North, after which the Xiongnu “did not return to establish itself” (不復自立) [*Hou Han*

shu 89: 2950]. As with the campaign of the Former Han, it was not until the neighboring Inner Asian groups joined the assaults was the Xiongnu empire truly faced with a devastating crisis. The Xianbei penetrated deep into the Xiongnu territory in 87, captured the chanyu Youliu, and flayed his body. A combined assault by the Han, Southern Xiongnu, Wuhuan from the east, and the Qiang羌 and other groups from the west pushed into the heart of the Xiongnu territory in coordinated columns and then “tread over the regions brought down by Modun, and set fire to the Long Court龍庭 of Lao Shang [Jiyu chanyu]” [*Hou Han shu* 23:815]. The Chinese general Dou Xian竇憲 and his forces then made sacrifices at a sacred Xiongnu mountain⁷¹ and erected a stone stele with an inscription marking the victorious campaign and ostensibly the end of the Xiongnu steppe empire:

鑠王師兮征荒裔， The fine Sovereign’s armies, campaigned into the desolate remote [regions],
 勦凶虐兮涖海外， Destroyed the fierce and cruel, brought order to beyond the seas,
 夔其邈兮互地界， Far-reached those distant [places], joined the territories and borders,
 封神丘兮建隆碣， Made *feng* [offerings] at Spirit Mount,⁷² erected a glorious tablet,
 熙帝載兮振萬世。 The splendor of the Emperor recorded, renowned for ten thousand generations.
 [*Hou Han shu* 23: 817]

⁷¹ The narrative of this event states that the Chinese general Dou Xian “made *feng* sacrifices on the mountain” (封山). The tradition of *feng* 封 and *shan* 禪 sacrifices along with the erection of authoritatively inscribed stele extends from the imperial tours of the first Chinese emperor of Qin. Though the exact meaning of the *feng* ritual is not explained, Kern (2000: 112) suggests a relationship to the concept of fiefs (another meaning of the word *feng* 封) and thus territorial claims, as implied in one of the Qin stele inscriptions meant to memorialize the control of a region which concludes with the symbolic phrase “obtain the fief” (得封).

⁷² The place of *feng* sacrifices is named as “Spirit Hill” or “Spirit Mount” (神丘), and the commentaries identify it as a mountain called Yanran 燕然. It is difficult, however, to know for sure to which mountain this label of “Spirit Mount” actually refers.

Chapter Five:

MATERIAL EVIDENCE OF POWER POLITICS

The articulations of social actors in the creation and manipulation of particular objects and places allows us to construe their motivations in the political arena. Material manifestations of divisions between social groups reflect strategies of differentiation employed for the benefit of self-elevating portions of society. These expressions of differentiation are consequently utilized to secure and justify restricted access to economic and ideological resources of power. Engagements in power politics permit a more dynamic understanding of polities rather than a static characterization. I will present here considerations of power, legitimacy and authority, as applied to material and written evidence, in order to address the ways in which steppe polities such as the Xiongnu were constituted and redefined in the face of exterior and interior pressures.

Historical and archaeological records often retain long periods with a dearth of information. We may speak of societies and peoples for these “dark” periods, since the absence of evidence is not necessarily the evidence of absence, but such societies nevertheless remain difficult to understand. Numerous practices of people in the past leave no vestiges of their activity, but the presence of material remnants of social and political practices constitutes more than a difference in the availability of researchable evidence. A significant increase in arenas of material remains often indicates an increased investment in the materialization of ideologies and institutions. Such materializations give social and political ideologies concrete physical form integral to their institutionalization and implementation (DeMarrais et al. 1996: 31).

I wish to qualify this increase as an amplification of the materialization of a particular arena of expression, and categorically different from the augmentation of particular elements within an arena. Periods of overall increased materialization should thus not be viewed as inherently more “complex” than other eras, but clearly signal a shift in social and political strategies. The increased complexity of divisions within an arena reflects a conceptually different issue. In the case of late Zhou period China, the growing chasm between the upper and lower élites constituted a change in the distinctions within funerary traditions, pushing mortuary investment more toward the upper echelons rather than the remaining ranks of society. Burials in early Bronze Age China exhibited a similar trend toward the elevation of the uppermost élites while mortuary practice normalized for most other portions of society (Campbell 2007: 228). Burials already exhibited a great deal of investment; the manner of investing surplus for interments and funerary rites simply shifted. Both cases exhibit increasingly exacerbated divisions between categories of investment within mortuary practices alongside an overall increase in funerary rites their materializations. These are closely related phenomenon, but conceptually different.

DeMarrais et al. (1996) construct an analytical model for power politics consisting of variant *means of materialization*. Each of these forms may be manipulated as sources of social power, though they vary in degree and kind of economic investment and accomplish varying political objectives. They include (but are not limited to): (a) *symbolic objects* that reward loyalty and generate consensus; (b) *events* that unify groups and express asymmetry within; (c) *monuments* that perpetuate images of power and control; and (d) *texts* that propagate messages. The particular agendas of these

materializations stem from different challenges faced by the society, and thus reflect a variety of intentions of the segments of society who employ them. Shelach and Pines (2006: 222) assert, through the example of social change in the Qin state, that materializations are not always the result of elite manipulations and can, in fact, exhibit “a kind of dialogue between sociopolitical strata” about identity and power. Since these strategies require a certain amount of economic investment, however, it would seem that the upper echelons of society more often than not play a dominant role in the manipulations of materializations. The manipulatable material propagations served to create cohesion, delineate and justify social divisions, and consolidate political power in the hands of those who orchestrated them.

In the above classification of materializations, the category of *texts* addresses the encapsulated ideologies within the narratives. In the present dissertation, I recognize these intended messages, but aim to work through them to look for evidence of institutions and agents which played a role in social and political spheres. The category of *symbolic objects* pertains to those prestige goods that are encoded with meaning, in the process of creation, through particular iconography or form. Since this material category is meant to denote portable, transferrable objects of value meant for distribution to “loyal” dependants, it may also include imported prestige goods in this category. Despite originating from a different society and bearing the iconography and form of a different set of cultural concepts, these foreign items retain an important place in the assemblage of prestige goods. Funerals and heir vestiges constitute some of the most significant examples of *monuments* and landscapes, and will be a focus of this dissertation as theaters of monumentality and event. The category of *events* is conceptually separated

from the issues of place and object, though it is through the remains of place and object that we come to understand these practices. Materializations represent the creation and articulation of social identity and power, and embody changing perceptions of how to signal status through object, place, and practice.

Certain materials and features, or more typically particular combinations thereof, may be more significant than others in strategies for social and political power. In order to discern such elements and assemblages, and in turn assert their implications in power politics, we must understand the changing contexts within which they occur. Dramatic shifts in assemblages of objects and features may correlate to “spurts” in social and political systems accompanied by new organizational techniques for the control of people and places (Mann 1986: 3).⁷³ Increased investment in materializations may be an example of such shifts, and an understanding of the goals of these materializations, and thus the intentions of those responsible for their creation, will help elucidate the nature of the shifts.

This emphasizes the actions of individuals and “what people do as knowledgeable actors [and] the intentions behind their actions...rather than the systems and structures of functionalist approaches” (Parker-Pearson 1999: 33). The understanding of materializations as outlined by DeMarrais et al. (1996) employs such concepts of agency to explain the reasons for creating these form and practices of ideology. The analysis of material culture nevertheless aims not to discern individual social personae as much as to

⁷³ I do not wish to engage in tautological discussions on whether this change arises more from a moment of *histoire événementielle* or decades of *conjunctures* (Braudel 1949), for the selection of one of these temporal categories of change would subscribe to the problematic dichotomies outlined above and betray the possibility of integrating historical and archaeological evidence.

view the whole corpus of individuals and their varying motivations, and elucidate manifestations of social differentiation and expressions of power (Parker-Pearson 1999: 94).

Before we proceed to identify evidence of power politics, we should define our usage of the concept of power. Kehoe (2002: 259) emphasizes that it is a quality, not a thing – “a capacity to effect some action or influence.” This capacity may also be considered a “measure of mastery over others” (Earle 1997: 3), and thus a quantitatively measured quality. In archaeological investigations of power, researchers have attempted to differentiate between personal and structural power, but the underlying objective pursues the means by which the will of a group or individual is imposed on others (Robb 1999: 4-6), or in other words, the sources of power. Anthropologists and social historians have outlined similar typologies, which most often include socio-political, economic, military, and ideological sources (Earle 1997; Mann 1986). What I wish to address here first is not the sources of power, but the expressions of it and means of reassuring it which we find in the material and textual records.

Accoutrements of Power

Prestige goods have been considered a category of evidence equated with the means of securing power, yet careless considerations of these materials may skirt the edge of tautological discussions on the relationship between prestige and power. In order to map out these concepts, we may begin with the premise that neither prestige nor the associated goods are inherent *sources* of power. Whether stemming from ideological traditions, economic control, military might, political institutions, or, most often, a

combination of these, power provides the means to acquire and control place or object, including those items which one might qualify as prestige goods.

Robb (1999: 6-7) argues that *prestige systems* “define the symbolic currencies [that] actors chase after and the limited scope of games through which actors pursue them.” When these goods are acquired, they are used to *express* power (again I say, not to garner it). Their possession and use in often proscribed practices expresses an inclusion in ranks of society that retain power. We should be reminded here, that power is not a qualitative distinction, but a quantitative measure, despite the divisions of the hierarchies or heterarchies within which it occurs. The cultural expression of power, which I define as prestige, may in turn serve as a (re)assurance of power. Thus the appearance of more complex prestige systems signals an attempt by those who have procured power to secure that power through the distribution of goods and performance of practices that form and augment political relationships beneficial to their maintenance of authority.

A “collage of competing interests” (Lesure 1999: 24) arises in this scheme between those in power wishing to retain and restrict it, and those who wish to raise their status and levels of prestige which would place them in the ranks of those powerful groups. In societies where the uppermost echelon has no institutionalized or guaranteed control over land or production, the higher élites attempt to control those below them through the supply of prestige goods required for principal cultural practices that might lead to the advancement of status. These lower groups thus depend on the upper echelon, which has the power to acquire the necessary materials, to supply them with the means of advancing their status in relation to their own dependants or those whom they might wish in turn to control (Haselgrove 1982: 81).

The transmission and acquisition of prestige goods thus becomes one of the most essential issues for discussions of power politics. Prestige goods are those items which require rare materials, high manufacture skill, high labor investment, or are otherwise rare due to availability issues in acquiring them from outside systems, and can be measured by their degrees of alienability (Haselgrove 1982; Lesure 1999). However, the elevation of an item to prestigious status not only stems from the energy expended to make or obtain it, but also depends upon ideological reinforcement from sumptuary rules or socio-political currents, which govern the amount of effort that goes into creating or procuring it (Parker-Pearson 1999; Saitta 1999; Wason 1994). These goods include more than luxury items for mere possession and display of wealth. They often demonstrate such wealth and prestige through their use (Arnold 1990), and, in the process, (re)configure and express socio-political relationships (Brumfiel 1987). Because of the emphasis on use and not just show of such prestigious items in the expression of power, I will also refer to this manner of valued objects as *accoutrements of power*.

A mutually exclusive dichotomy often appears between dispersal and concentration of these valued items, but we may reassess our use of these terms of circulation by considering the strategies of ideal distribution, or one which combines the concepts of dispersal and concentration.⁷⁴ Goods may be dispersed across many areas but still concentrated within the hands of a limited group. A *distributed concentration* of accoutrements of power would serve to bind local leaders in the broader political network while still limiting consumption. Aztec rulers encouraged the deployment and

⁷⁴ Lewis (1999) makes a similar combination of terms in his description of Late Bronze Age China, when he characterizes the states as having *extended* their power as well as *concentrated* it in the hands of the ruler.

consumption of elite goods in that it created a dependency upon the networks and agents of distribution subsumed by the Aztec polity (Brumfiel 1987). However, if too many lower elites acquire the accoutrements of power in too great an amount, then these prestige items become devalued. A change in prestige goods assemblages often indicates restructuring by the upper elites in order to acquire and elevate new exceptional items (Arnold 1990: 73).

Ruling elites employ a number of strategies to prevent the inflation of prestige goods, by (a) imposing proscriptions of production, circulation, or consumption; (b) encouraging rituals that require the deposition of these goods in burials; or (c) obtaining the goods from outside (Haselgrove 1982; Schortman and Urban 1992). In many cases, it seemed the longer the distance or the more intricate the “social life” of the object, the greater its value. Cowry shells were treasured in many parts of inland China during the Bronze Age because of their limitation to marine waters and thus necessity for long-distance trade to obtain them (Li 2006: 17). In a society where those with the utmost of authority still did not manage the means for substantial control of production or possessed the infrastructure to control only interstate and not intrastate movement of materials, the dependence upon imported prestige goods served well the need for regulating consumption and distribution. However, if a polity and its ruling elite depended heavily on imports for prestige systems, the severing of interstate commerce would dry up the supply of critical prestige goods and the secondary elites would be in a position to challenge the upper echelon (Arnold 1990).

In his study of fifth millennium BC expansion of agricultural communities into the forest-steppe zones of Eastern Europe, Chapman (2002) asserts that the appearance of

exotic goods often correlates with the creation of new arenas of power for their consumption. He also demonstrates the possibility of these foreign objects to be deposited within more traditional and domestic arenas of power thus leading to the “domestication of the exotic.” These variant contexts of deposition often differ from their contexts of use, though it is the contexts of deposition that are “fundamental to the manner in which that object or raw material has been domesticated” (Chapman 2002: 75). Fisher (1995: 162) asserts that ritual practices, in opposition to elements of material culture, cannot be easily transferred without modification of its components. Scholars have asserted that the use and meaning of symbolic or prestigious goods are often “lost in translation” when transferred to other ethnic or social groups (Beck 1995: 171; Chapman 2002: 76), yet to declare a loss in the process of translation assumes some degree of attempt to either retain the object’s original symbolism or consciously reconstruct a new meaning and significance more attune to the importing society.

Before making assumptions about the nature of changes in meanings of the imported prestige objects, we should consider again their uses in making statements about access to wealth and social connections and maintaining positions of power (Schortman and Urban 1992: 153; Wells 1992: 186). As the value of objects in prestige systems often depended upon the degrees of effort necessary to produce or procure them, the foreign character of the imported goods frequently remained emphasized. A sixth century BC Celtic burial in Hochdorf, Germany (Biel 1986) has been touted in debates about exotic goods and long-distance traded materials in elite burials and provides a suitable example for the present discussion (Arnold 1999; Dietler 1990; Parker-Pearson 1999; Wells 1992, 2001, among others) [Fig.5.1].

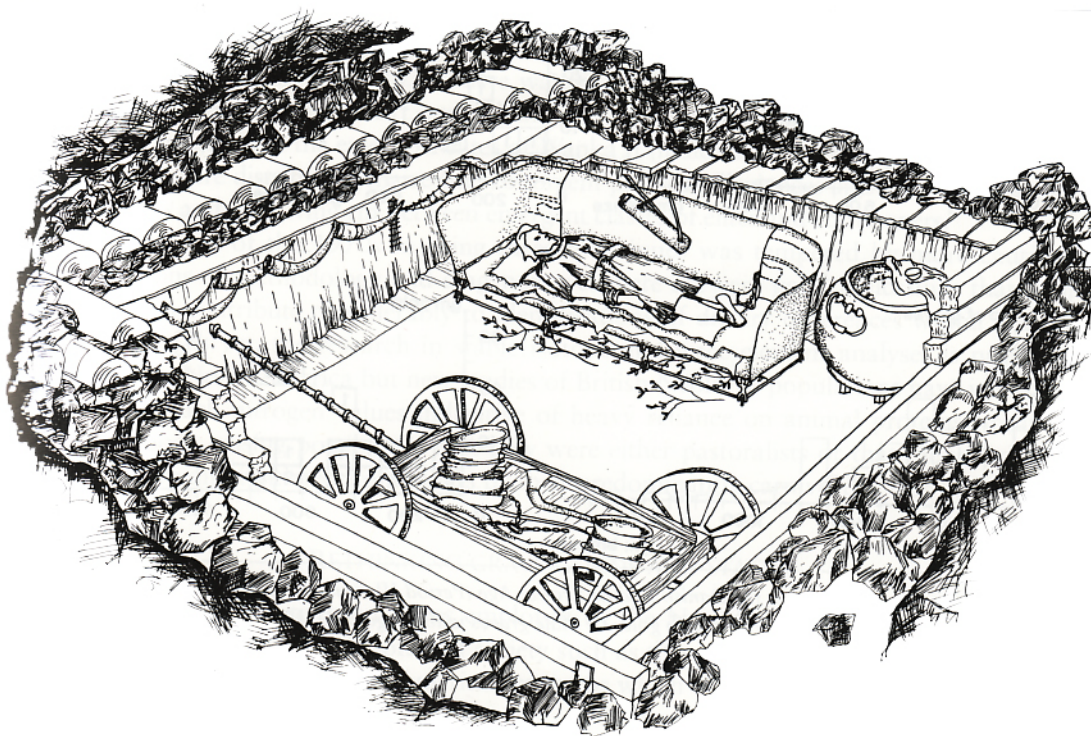


Fig. 5.1 Celtic grave at Hochdorf (Parker-Pearson 1999: 81, after Biel 1986)

A tomb mound marked a multilayered log chamber that interred an élite man with accoutrements standard of the Celtic burials: neck ring and brooch, dagger, wagon, and feasting equipment. These burial goods saw a bit of departure from other graves in the quality of their manufacture and material, but it was the addition of other non-standard elements which has caught the attention of archaeologists. Eight horn vessels hung along one wall beside a ninth larger one decorated with iron and gold. These nine vessels corresponded to nine bronze dishes found on the wagon, and perhaps raised this burial assemblage and the tomb occupant to a more “special” status.⁷⁵ In addition, were locally made textiles and grave furnishings with motifs from cultures of the Mediterranean, and a

⁷⁵ A manner of “special assemblage” that varies from a preponderance of “ordinary assemblages” has been documented for late Bronze Age China (Falkenhausen 2006). The critical difference here is that this special occurrence in the tomb at Hochdorf seems not to constitute an institutionally delineated and more prestigious assemblage, rather a conscious departure from the normal collection of goods marks in this particular occasion of interment (Wells 2001).

large bronze cauldron of Greek manufacture, with a golden bowl inside, that stood at the foot of the funerary couch and contained remnants of a beverage most likely meant for filling the vessels in the grave.

The remnant mead found in the bottom of the cauldron poses an interesting situation – imported prestigious vessels used to consume local beverages. Arnold (1999: 74-5) notes that while Mediterranean wine did not appear to enter the alcohol-thirsty Celtic communities until later, the pattern of an élite beverage still existed. Mead, or beer made from honey, at that time was a limited commodity since bees were not domesticated yet and the honey would have to be found and gathered from the wild. This would have been one of many restricted items of élite consumption, along with exotic items such as the Greek cauldron. Imported ceramic and metal drinking vessels augmented the local ones, and foreign objects such as these expressed the power inherent in the control of networks required to obtain them and “lent an aura of cosmopolitanism” to the élite who displayed and used them in large feasts (Wells 2001: 49). It should be noted that exotic items did not create the chiefs and their political networks, but many of them provided the chiefs with resources that could be stock piled and controlled (Arnold 1999: 74).

The use of exotic prestige goods in new social contexts depends upon their acceptance as items of value (Saitta 1999: 136), and the transference of such imports would seem more viable if they entered into pre-existing contexts of practice. In the case of the Greek drinking vessels, and later wine, these items entered into what is known from both archaeological evidence and copious historical sources to be a culture of drinking. Though some changes in drinking assemblages may have eventually occurred

(Arnold 1999: 74), the drinking ritual remained central to social and political interactions. The importation of numerous items and symbols from outside one's culture has often been equated to the eventual destruction of that culture (Scarry 1999: 356), but we should not assume, as many acculturation models do, an inevitable decline and disappearance of a culture that capitalizes upon exotic goods. People often adopt symbols and exotica without necessarily adapting to the social constructs of the original contexts of those items (Wason 1994: 97).

I propose, instead, that foreign prestige goods may enter another culture without necessarily altering the traditions of the importing society or losing their exotic character in a process of "domestication" (Chapman 2002). Prestige goods express and articulate relationships of power through their controlled consumption and use, and foreign objects presented the upper echelons of society with items outside their own society which, once networks of interaction were established so as to acquire them, could be more easily controlled. The exotic nature of imported items would have served as a reminder of the privileges and power needed to acquire such goods, and of the extent of socio-political networks behind their acquisition. In the case of the vessels in Celtic burials, and more specifically in the tomb at Hochdorf, the exotic goods did not require the creation of a new arena of use. They entered an arena of ritual significance and became part of a central social practice of drinking. On the other hand, this manner of incorporation did not "domesticate" the exotic such that it became an element synonymous with the culture of the importing society. The preservation of the exotic nature of the imported prestige goods was critical to the expression of power for which they were employed in social rites central to forming and solidifying political networks.

Many of the examples cited in studies of exotic goods assume a core-periphery relationship that frames the transference of goods from a dominant culture to a “passive periphery” (Lightfoot and Martinez 1995), but such a construct of imbalance impedes any true understanding of the nature of the exotic goods or the relationship between two cultures.⁷⁶ The manner in which prestige systems come to accept foreign prestige goods initiates discussions of agency and the intentions of the élite members of society. Exceptional assemblages like that of the Hochdorf tomb present not formalized sets of the richest burial goods but evidence of active decisions in the event of individual interments, when the interred accoutrements of power vary according to interpretation or augmentation of the tools of social rituals.

Agents of Power

To understand the way in which prestige systems come to accept foreign prestige goods, or the “special” augmentations to standard burial assemblages which are not part of a formalized set, we may employ models of agency. In the mortuary arena, this helps us to discern the effect of choices due to social or political currents, in contrast to sumptuary rules or in the process of creating new ones. Sudden or particular changes in social practice or political institutions, or even the material culture which may relate to these, may benefit from agency approaches, but we must also be cautious in the degree to

⁷⁶ Scarry’s (1999) study of the relationship between the Apalachee tribes and Spanish conquering forces presents one of many studies of the acculturating effects of the Europeans on the peoples of their new colonies. Johnson (2006) has proposed a reversal of this tide toward studying the effects of colonization on the peoples “back home” in Europe.

which we place responsibility for such change in the hands of intending actors or a single actor.

Surges of change are often attributed to particular events or people in history – be it a rising autocrat like Julius Caesar in Rome or politician like Shang Yang 商鞅 in the Qin state – and historical records are accordingly seen as limited to Braudel’s (1949) level of event-history (Morris 2002).⁷⁷ However, long historical narratives do permit the observances of structural changes beyond individual people or events through the numerous actions, and deduced actors behind them, mentioned within the accounts. The aim, again, is not to critique a single persona, but rather to analyze all the elements in the narratives to discern any indications of changes over time.

The social transformations of the Qin state over the course of the fourth century BC were undoubtedly phenomenal, and occurred in a relative “spurt” of political reform which catapulted the Qin state into more aggressive policies of expansive control and contractive state-building (Lewis 1999). Among the many reformers of state, some of their names appear in the accounts and some of their ideas are preserved as scant fragments in other works, yet only the statesman Shang Yang (d. 338 BC) received a full biography in the historic annals as well as retains a complete work attributed to him, the *Book of Lord Shang* (*Shang jun shu* 商君書). Historians have shown, however, that most of Shang Yang’s reforms existed in the other states and many had begun generations before him. Lewis (1999: 611-616) recognizes the outstanding manner in which Shang Yang put forth these reforms in a more systematic fashion than before, but cautions us

⁷⁷ This trend is particularly characteristic of Chinese history, which tends toward a “mytho-historical consciousness” (Bantly 1996) and the attribution of social, economic and political change to a single individual or event.

against attributing “five centuries [to] the work of a single evil genius.” Archaeological evidence demonstrates centuries of social, economic and political development in the Qin leading up to its foundation of the Chinese empire (Teng 2002), but there is a discernable and sudden shift datable to the fourth century BC (Shelach and Pines 2006) which draws our attention to this period. While we must acknowledge the heritage of political thought and policies from which Shang Yang apparently drew, and so cannot give him credit for centuries of change, we should not, even in the face of archaeological evidence for changes over the entire fourth century BC, gloss over his significance, or rather the significance of statesmen like him, in the history of the Qin state. Nevertheless, in the considerations of periods with archaeological and textual evidence, do we speak of agency more when we possess names, identities, and even the words of individuals in historical records?

The tendency toward *identification correspondence* between individual historical figures and social and political changes seen in historical or archaeological evidence becomes greater when we address the personae of rulers, who in theory often retained the privilege to command such changes, sometimes suddenly. The rise of a single charismatic leader is often deemed a critical proponent of state formation in Inner Asia. The ascension of a founding ruler may be accompanied by strong militarism, but the designation of this “supratribal” leader almost always comes via the consent of the élite who rise along with him, consigning a portion of their authority to him with the understanding that he will solve crises of state (Di Cosmo 1999a: 19-21). How do we then speak of the effects of agent actors in the transformation of social practices without

mapping specific changes as single events onto individuals mentioned in the historical records?

In his study of Shaka of South East Africa and the emergence of a state, Flannery (1999: 15) emphasizes the centrality of some degree of power-sharing in states, which should not be confused with corporate rule or councils, and the role that strong agents played in the creation of states. He traces the rise of the ruler Shaka, who created a militant core of loyal followers, with whom he shared some power, and raised income through intensified production and procurement of resources. The focus of his argument lies in his contention that states do not “evolve” through a process of increasing social complexity, but rather are “created” through the impetuses of agents (Flannery 1999: 5). In the case of the Qin state, a shift in materializations accords with a shift in the intentions of a new meritocratic élite in power, the driving force behind the new mortuary practices. This new élite embraced local customs and manipulated their expression for the purposes of cohesions and legitimation of state control of this new political base. Though we may read exhaustively of identifiable rulers and politicians in the narratives, we may perhaps also catch references to sometimes nameless constituents and their situations. Their ambitions, and even actions, may be excavated from such scant mentions in the texts and gleaned from materializations in the archaeological record.

Arenas of Power

Agents of expressions of power and participants in the practices which demonstrate it actively create frames of perception and experience (Dunham 1999: 118-119). Kehoe (2002: 259-60) defines these tropes as *theaters of power*, or “tropes of

governmental power [that] encode asserted cosmic power through sheer monumentality.” Physical remains of these represent both the performance and the stage. Despite the grand scales of many of the mortuary monuments discussed in this dissertation, I chose to adopt the term in a more general manner, emphasizing it as a place of performative action in which power is expressed. This allows us to include places of all kinds, mortuary or otherwise, and all scales in our discussion of materialized events and the arenas for the use of accoutrements of power. I will discuss other theaters and practices through inference, but the analyses will focus on the mortuary arena that dominates the material record of the Iron Age steppes and the practices performed there.

Burials are places of intersection between the living community, the deceased, and the supernatural, and they provide focused contexts for actions of commemoration, including subsequent burials and ritual activities (Williams 2006: 150). The place of these interments were very often delineated and indicated with visible surface demarcations. These so-called monuments were permanent testaments to the memory of the deceased, or a type of “technology of remembrance” (Jones 2003) alongside artifacts, rituals, and landscapes (Williams 2006: 27-33). Mortuary constructions and their associated rites were a function of many intentions, including social differentiation and cohesion, justification of elite control, legitimation of authority, and territorial claims. I have spoken above about the multiplicity of vertical and horizontal social distinctions and touched on the manner in which they simultaneously unify and divide. What I wish to explore now are the justifications of identities of inclusion and alienation and the manner in which they are legitimized and reinforced through practices within theaters of power.

Funerary performances and displays occasion the articulation of social networks and allow for competitive displays between groups. Competition between nominally equivalent social or kin groups was certainly a factor in funerary display (McHugh 1999: 43), but hierarchical divisions were also probably open to competitive displays that tested social boundaries. Those beneath may, and often do, challenge those above. The mortuary arena thus affords the possibility of contravening social hierarchies and contesting those in positions of power, and, as such, also becomes a theater in which those in power perform practices which serve to demonstrate and justify their authority. The escalating size and opulence of the tombs of the ruling élite in Qin certainly manifested intentions of those within the upper echelon to securely separate themselves from the lower élites and firmly demonstrate their power over them. Monumental tombs and élite funerary ostentation did not necessarily appear at the emergence of states, but they certainly contributed to political legitimation (Piggott 1979).

Articulations of power for mortuary monuments consisted not only of funerary elaboration but also deliberate evocations of past funerary traditions and calculated placement in the landscape. The early medieval mounds at Sutton Hoo cemetery in England made noticeable reference to the prehistoric monuments seen within the immediate landscape (Williams 2006: 160-162). The immediacy of the previous barrows to the medieval mounds undoubtedly made for an obvious association, though evocations of preceding traditions do not necessitate proximity. Burials may draw upon known traditions while spatially distinguishing themselves and still laying claim to a similar region. According to Saxe (1970), formal disposal areas establish corporate rights to specific regions and the resources within their reaches. Charles (1995) attempted to

reformulate this hypothesis through studies of Mississippian hunter-gatherers, asserting that mobile groups, by the spatially shifting requirements of their subsistence strategies, do not employ formal disposal areas for corporate territorial claims. Goldstein's (1976) earlier amendments to Saxe's hypothesis suggest that the absence of such formalized burial grounds does not preclude territorial claims, and in the face of mobile groups of the Inner Asian steppes, we should perhaps listen to this proviso. Parker-Pearson (1999: 137) provides several examples contrary to Charles' reworking of Saxe's hypothesis, to the point that one might take the results of the Mississippian study of mobile groups and their burial practices as a possible scenario rather than a rule maker. Mobility does not preclude territoriality.

The elaboration of funerals, manifested in burial form, placement and goods, reflects an intent to project power and secure authority, though such ritual shows run the risk of failing (Metcalf and Huntington 1991: 6). Escalating degrees of investment should, however, not necessarily presuppose that grave ostentation equates to social or political crises (cf. Kossack 1998). Whether along hierarchical or heterarchical lines of distinction, increased investment most often signals the knowledgeable objective of agents of power to avoid crises of failure. I further argue that the choice to amplify expenditure in these demonstrations may at times reflect not a society *in* crisis but rather a society *responding to* a crisis – one which led to a change in mortuary customs and other practices, and one against which the more elaborate rites meant to serve as insurance. Sustained ability to construct monumental burials and engage in more elaborate funerary rituals would reflect some amount of increase in wealth to the point of obtaining a continual surplus of goods

and labor, and securing access to it. The investment in ostentatious burials evinces a purposeful expression of such ability to procure surplus.

The mortuary theater, in which this surplus is displayed, demonstrated and distributed through the course of funerary rites, represents an arena of community activity. The community formalizes relationships through variables of investment and performance. Tainter (1977) proposed a relationship between energy expenditure – in construction, furnishings, offerings, treatment of the body, and rites – and status of the individual for whom the burial is made. Despite critiques of the details of his argument, the energy expenditure thesis endures in its general principle – the correlation between investment and projected power or status – but *by* whom and *for* whom this energy is expended has been contested.

Flad (2002) contends that different *spaces* within the burial reflect different *stages* of separate activities within a funeral sequence. This division of space may also be interpreted as a purposeful separation, where circumscribed spaces connote similar states of being (Campbell 2007), correlate to comparable practices, or contain items of related functions (Flad 2002). In the case of burial customs in Bronze Age northeast China, Flad addresses a clear spatial division between the remains of what he determines to be “disposal rites” and “funeral rites” – in other words, between those materials associated directly with the life and identity of the deceased, adjacent to the body, and those which are part of the often competitive ritual practices in which the living participate in the process of interment, in an elevated niche and elsewhere in the grave outside the immediate vicinity of the deceased [Fig.5.2].

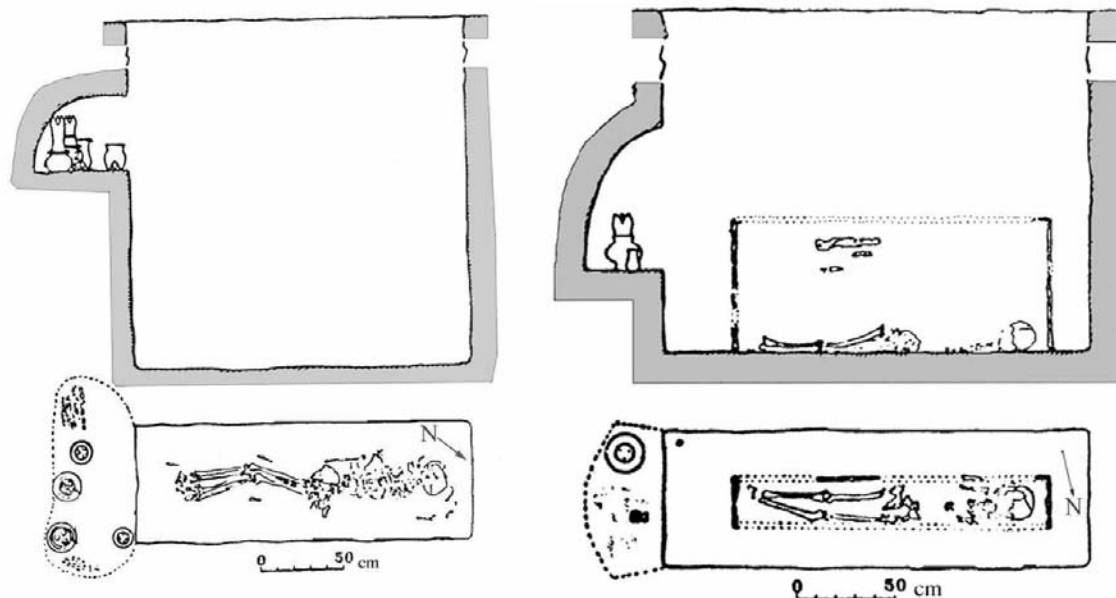


Fig.5.2 Graves 25 and 79, Fanzhangzi, Inner Mongolia (Flad 2002: 34-35, after Nei Menggu gongzuodui 1984)

Through this approach, we may consider the social circumstances and identities of the individual as well as the intentional displays of those participating in funeral rites. In fact, most stages of interments and their materializations may be analyzed in regard to participation and motivations of the community that inter the deceased.

Mortuary practices consist of a chain of ceremonies (Bartel 1982) and most often begin not with sacraments surrounding the deposition of the body but with preparation of a burial space. The decision of location, consecration of the plot, and digging of earth and stones constitute community activities, especially with the mobilization of labor for the construction of monumental tombs. Tainter's (1977) thesis of energy expenditure no doubt bears significance for quantitative differentiation of social investment, but what I wish to emphasize here is not only the grave size but the communal ritual context created in the sizeable assembly of people gathered to construct and consecrate a burial place.

The tomb thus becomes a materialization of the rite of construction, and the burial goods should similarly be considered as materializations of funerary rites.

Walker (1995) maintains that many archaeologically recovered materials are treated as mere reflections of particular belief systems, reduced to assemblages of artifacts charged with meaning but devoid of functional use – an approach that Fogelin (2007) would characterize as analytical emphasis on religion rather than ritual. Through ethnographic and archaeological comparative studies, Walker proposes that collections of bones, vessels, and the like may be the mere leftovers of rituals rather than constructed offerings – or “ceremonial trash” – and that these materials were not constructed as offerings nor was their depositional state or place the goal of the actions which put them there. He takes stock in the phrase which he quotes from a minister – “What we can’t burn, we bury” – to argue that not all remains of ritual activity should be seen as an offering (Walker 1995: 75). With examples such as the placement of broken bowls on the side of a mound or a cache of bear bones and ceramics beside a river, his assertion bears merit, and should by all means be considered a possibility when studying the remains of some previous perhaps ritual action. We must therefore be attentive to the contents and, most especially, the contexts of these deposits. The consignment of remnant materials to an obviously sacred space such as a burial may incline one to correlate them to more than “ceremonial trash.”

Valeri (1994) provides a scheme for a ritualized process of sacrifice which that may be utilized to emphasize both the ritual activity as well as the remains of such practices. If we employ a dynamic consideration of offering and sacrifice, we may approach an understanding of the use-life of the materials that accumulate in the burial

space. Valeri (1994: 106-8) separates the action of sacrifice into four stages: (1) *induction* – the procurement, preparation and dedication of the offering, (2) *taking a life* – the “killing” of the offering, though this need not be a violent act, (3) *renunciation* – the separation of part(s) to be destroyed or bestowed to the deceased, and (4) *consumption* – the literal devouring or figurative utilization of the remainder of the offering by the participants of the ceremony. If we consider offerings as part of a greater process of sacrifice, then those artifacts found in graves are the material end of that process.

Valeri’s model stems from research on the forest Huaulu groups of Seram, Indonesia and the ritual hunting, killing and feasting of prized, wild ayokuan meat. His dynamic model thus emphasizes the procurement and treatment of the offerings which he observed and documented, or the activities for which we often find no direct evidence in the mortuary record.⁷⁸ Many of the materials deposited within the burial space are the vestiges of such the ritual consecration and consumption of offerings, and we may use these remains as links to the funeral rites associated with the mortuary theaters of power. We should thus perhaps add a final stage for the case of mortuary offerings – *deposition* within the burial space of the renounced portions. Though Valeri speaks of these segregated portions as parts of the consumed offering, we may also include the accoutrements of sacrifice and consumption as pieces which may be renounced in the process. This may account for the presence of the objects and tools of offerings in burials.

⁷⁸ This does not include the plethora of data and studies of remnants of feasts and hunting recovered from non-mortuary contexts.

Valeri (1994:104-5) generally defines a sacrificial offering as a life ritually taken for a particular benefit; yet while the action of sacrifice implies the destruction or “killing” of the entity, it more importantly denotes the giving up of something significant. In his case study, it is the rare wild ayokuam, which must be procured through the efforts of a hunt. Kelly (2001) purports that domestic animals were more conducive to offerings because wild animals could not be stored and domestic animals are a source of wealth and surplus. However, the significance of a sacrifice can be distinguished quantitatively – demonstrating an unusual amount taken from accumulated resources – or qualitatively – as in the selection of rare, prized, or restricted objects of sacrifice. The inclusion of wild animals can be a symbolic demonstration of power through the hunts that procure them (Fiskesjö 2001; Valeri 1994), and rare animals can demonstrate access to and control of long distance trade networks necessary to obtain them (Jackson and Scott 2003). The demonstration of any of these served to promote the agendas of those making the sacrifice, whether to reaffirm social differentiation, solidify social relations, or advance contestations of the power of others. Interhuman relations played a central role in the process of sacrifice (Valeri 1994: 109).

Funerary offerings often reflect competition in the escalating amounts and kinds of sacrifices made. At times assemblages of artifacts and animals were augmented even with humans. Royal Shang tombs of Early Bronze Age China were surrounded by numerous pits with animals and humans and accompanied by an assortment of humans and animals within various portions of the tomb pits [Fig.5.3]. The human offerings are considered within separate areas of deposition constituting distinct layers of a “hierarchy of being” (Campbell 2007): the congregation of human capital in sacrificial pits in the

environs of the tombs, sacrificial victims in the outer regions of the pit, most especially the ramp, and the death attendants placed on ledges adjacent to the chamber of the deceased. While the sacrificed captives, often mutilated, are offered within a logic of punishment, pacification, reduction and consumption on behalf of the soul of the deceased ruler, the sacrificed retainers, with no evidence of incurred violence, evidence the ultimate in social obligations of dependency and patronage between the deceased and his subordinates (Campbell 2007: 260-261).

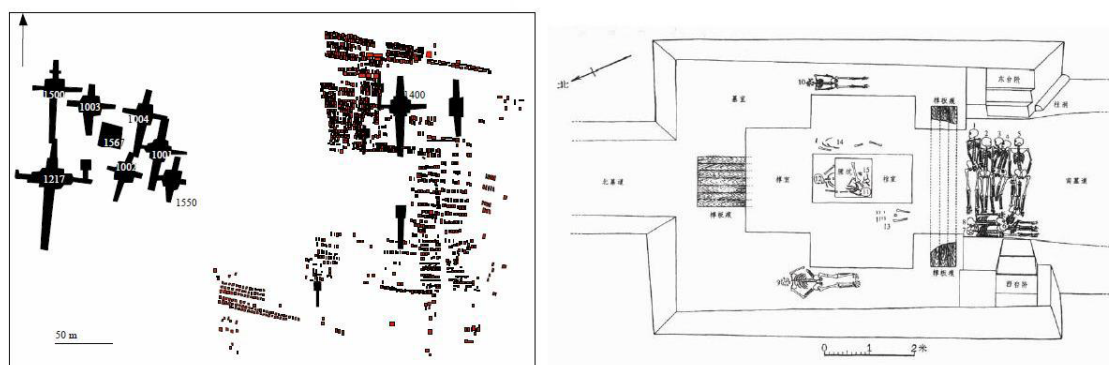


Fig. 5.3 Shang Dynasty (a) Xibeigang Royal Cemetery and Sacrificial Pits, (b) Cheng Zi Kou tomb
(from Campbell 2007: 386, 394; after (a) Tang 2004 and (b) Henan 2000)

The presence of sacrificial victims and death attendants both demonstrate the empowered status of the deceased. If we also take into account the role of the living, who construct the burials and participate in the rites of interment, we must consider their own vested interests in the magnitude and nature of the offerings, whether object, animal, or human. The kin of the death attendees would perhaps have a stake in such followers being eternally associated with the deceased, for this would inexorably link them to the power expressed in the mortuary monuments and ceremonies that construct, and often bolster, the identity of the deceased and the position of the more immediate kin and associates of the deceased.

On the other hand, there may have been a vested interest by some portions or particular members of society in the practices which saw to the elimination of the close associates of the previous leader, in the process of establishing new leadership. Among the Mongols, rival candidates for ultimate leadership within a large tribe often had their own personal followers, called *nökör*, who aided in the competition for support from other tribal leaders in order to garner the position of supremacy. The bond between a supreme leader and his immediate subordinates, who consequently aided him in ruling, was so personal a bond that new rising leaders would often have to “reinvent” the personnel of the ruling body upon their subsequent ascension (Fletcher 1986). The institutionalized elimination of those closest to the deceased ruler may have been of benefit to new rising authority.

If we return to the earlier stages of sacrifice as outlined by Valeri (1994), then we may revisit the issue of consumption and feasting – practices often integral to mortuary traditions and their associated theaters of power. Feasts, like funerals, provide moments when unity, divisions, hierarchies, and boundaries may be created, reinforced, or dismantled (Dillehay 1990; McHugh 1999; O’Shea 1995; Parker-Pearson 1999) Though numerous expressions exuding prestige may be performed rather than constructed (Kehoe 2001: 260), and only some of the performative rites yield remains of the accoutrements, resulting offerings, or “trash,” feasting constitutes a heavily materialized practice in both the objects and tools of consumption.

Hayden (2001: 28) defines a *feast* as “any sharing between two or more people of special foods (i.e. foods generally not served) in a meal for a special purpose,” but the function more than the features should take precedence in considerations of the ritual and

social significance of a feast. Jackson and Scott (2003) provide research on Mississippian Native American groups that demonstrates elite status affording access to choice cuts of standard animals as well as instances of exotic species imported from outside their habitat, like bison and shark. The restricted feasts of imported foods for the Moundville elite stand in contrast to the large feasts at the Cahokia mound sites (Kelly 2001), where the expression of grandeur was not through qualitative means of exotic and choice foods but massive quantitative demonstrations of power in the consumption of local and customary kills. Thus we are reminded that feasts should not be restricted to the consumption of rare or “special” items. Quantitative expressions of power usually emphasize *redistributive* functions and demonstrations of surplus, incorporating larger groups or multiple levels of social hierarchy, as in the example of the Cahokia feasts. Qualitative articulations are more often *restrictive* in nature and demonstrative of access to restricted sources, through particular social relations, as feasts like those at Moundville can be restricted in attendance or participation.

According to Hayden, offerings of food and drink in which there is no consumption do not qualify as feasts. This may be difficult to determine in the archaeological record since the consumable substance of food or drink seldom preserves. We must instead reconstruct the feasts through the refuse of bones from which the meat comes, vessels with which the food and drink was consumed, or the spaces created for ritual consumption. As Valeri (1994) points out, there is often a stage of consumption that accompanies the overall process of sacrificial offering, so offerings may still exist within the rubric of feasting. Dietler (2001: 65) defines the term *feast* as “an analytical rubric used to describe forms of ritual activity that involve the consumption of food and drink.”

In this definition we see an emphasis on the nature of the activity rather than the specific characteristics of its physical elements. More often than not the quantitative or qualitative distinctions of the remains of a feast, as well as the specific nature of the ritual accoutrements, distinguish this ritualized action, but we must accept the occurrence of ritualized meals for a special purpose that do not appear different from regular instances of consumption in the archaeological record.

Those feasts which more often attract the attention of researchers are the practices of qualitative or quantitative differences in the consumption that reflect intentions to bolster social distinctions and connections. Feasting appears predominant in many funerary contexts, such as the above mentioned instances of the Celtic graves and the Chinese Bronze Age interments. Just as displays in monumentality of tombs runs the risk of failure in their display, so do feasts present the possibility for failure of the social system they aim to reinforce. If social and political stability comes to be dependant upon these practices of redistribution and expressions of power, the moment the surplus diminishes or the supply of exotic dries up, the subordinates may rise to challenge the upper echelons. Prestigious goods and ritualized practices within theaters of power both run an equal risk of not achieving the goals of social systems and the agents behind them.

The Politics of Power, Legitimacy, and Authority

The practices outlined above, understood through the material, people and places associated with them, present an assortment of means by which active agents seek to attain and, more importantly, retain authority in relation to their constituents. The present study of politics thus follows the investigations of social practices rather than systems –

or as Smith (2003: 80) states, “how rulers create subjects, how regimes ensure their reproduction, how institutions establish and defend discrete spheres of power, and how governments ensure legitimacy.” Smith addresses political landscapes and “built spaces” of political institutions through the examples of Maya architecture and geopolitics, fortresses of the Urartu polity, and urban regimes of Mesopotamia. These examples and their resulting definitions of political practices appear to depend on evidence of civil architecture and sedentary societies. While walled sites and urban centers clearly existed in the steppes and played significant roles in their related polities (Rogers et al. 2005), the study of political institutions and the constitution of authority should not be limited to such foci of political landscapes. Political centers may also be mobile and leave no material remains of their structure (Andrews 1999). In this case, we may instead look for evidence of loci in political landscapes through the remains of practices such as feasting and the construction of ritual monuments (cf. Houle 2009). In the present study of steppe polities, I will investigate the importance of mortuary theaters of power in the constitution of authority.

Earle (1997) presents a dualism of power and authority, in which the former implies force and a means of control, and the latter the right and responsibility to lead. He views authority as a form of ideology and a source of power. Smith (2003), however, sees authority as constituted by power, and reinforced by legitimacy. He conceptualizes institutionalized claims – *legitimacy* – and demonstrable means – *power* – as the bases of the implementation and justification of control seated in *authority*. An insurgent group may possess power to wrest control but lack the capacity to maintain it without institutionalized validation. On the other hand, a group which retains formalized

legitimacy may lack the power to enact control over its supposed subordinates. In other words, power and legitimacy are equally necessary in order to possess true authority exert uncontested control (Smith 2003: 109). The possession and use of prestige goods and monumental constructions demonstrate power, and the iteration of formalized traditions in restricted goods, spaces, and social ranks reflects structured claims of legitimacy. The manifestations and accounts of these conventions in material records may therefore serve as evidence of power politics and the edification of authority.

Chapter Six:

ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS OF IRON AGE EASTERN INNER ASIA

Chronological and spatial extremes are imperative to the process of delineating a cultural, social, or political entity through archaeological evidence. Once units of analysis have been identified, then we may begin to ascertain the nature, the variations within the identified group, and the relationship with other delineated groups. It is important to note that the conceptualization and comparative analysis of groups may be conducted at several levels at once, just as material in the archaeological record may relate to numerous layers of identity at once. In this chapter, I will consider first the chronological precedents to the Xiongnu phenomenon. This recognizes the preceding presence of significant pastoral groups before the Iron Age polity of the Xiongnu and illuminates traditions within the steppe from which the Inner Asian polity could have drawn.

I will also extend my investigations of archaeological material beyond the standard considerations of the Mongolian steppes. The territories of northern China, southern Siberia, and Mongolia, as well as portions of Kazakhstan, all contain sites pertaining to the arenas of the Iron Age groups that neighbored, interacted with, and formed portions of the steppe empires. Many valuable and exhaustive studies of these sites have unfortunately been limited to remains within their respective modern national borders (Kyzlasov 1979; Konovalov 1976; Torbat 2004). I have included all possible regions of material in an attempt to fully contextualize the areas in question, define the edges of distribution for particular material traditions, and identify zones of interaction between different traditions in eastern Inner Asia. The following presentation of material

is meant to identify an assemblage (or assemblages) of material evidence which may be attributed to the presence of a large political entity centered in present day-Mongolia from the late first millennium BC to early first millennium AD. It is then important to illustrate any possible chronological divisions within that time period and to note the nature of changes in the material record.

The origins of the steppe polity in the Mongolian steppes has dominated archaeological studies of this large period (Honeychurch 2004) and been the center of attention for historical research as well (Di Cosmo 2002). What I wish to address in this dissertation is rather the changes which occurred during the life of the state, and the causes, manner and means for such change. To this end, I will address both the chronological limits and the internal chronology of the materials related to the Iron Age polity. To define and differentiate the steppe groups, I will rely foremost on daily use objects, i.e. the materials subject to the subtle differences of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977), their varied functional and stylistic articulations, as well as evidence of ritual traditions, seen mostly in burial customs. Both of these have the added benefit of being the least affected by looting, since they are either less affected by the disturbances of robbing or not the target of such activities, and thus provide more data and opportunities for statistical presentations and analyses. Through considerations of the archaeological material and the chronologies and changes therein, we may reassess the periods and dynamics narrated by the historical records.

Note on Chronological Delineations

The designation of Iron Age indicates different dates depending on which region of the world one examines. Hall (1997) has collected Carbon-14 absolute dates for numerous archaeological sites in Central Inner Asia and from them presented the beginnings of a refined chronology for the Iron Age of Inner Asia, spanning the entirety of the first millennium BC. Focusing on sites and cultures between northwest China and the Caspian Sea, he includes classic cultures of the mid first millennium BC like Pazyryk within the realm of the Iron Age. For the broader realm of East Asia, the well-established designation of Bronze Age has denoted the early second to mid first millennium BC according to the preponderance of ritual bronze vessels centered in China (Wen 1980), or elaborate bronze daggers in the case of northern steppe cultures, though the beginnings of the use of iron in China in the early first millennium BC (Wagner 1996) conflicts with such a division between ages of bronze and iron.

The recent book by Koryakova and Epimakhov (2007) on the Bronze and Iron Ages of Western Inner Asia presents a chronology that incorporates absolute dates of archaeological material, relative dates from artifacts, and historical chronologies, as well as reflecting on all of those for the areas of Eastern Inner Asia. Their resulting timeline spans from approximately 700 BC to 300 AD, with a True Stage of the Iron Age from 200BC to 300 AD (Koryakova and Epimakhov 2007: 17-19). They have nevertheless recognized, as have other scholars, the limitations of periods defined by metallurgy, since technologies of metallurgy develop in interspersed regions at different rates.

For the purposes of this dissertation on the steppe groups of Eastern Inner Asia, I still utilize the designation of Iron Age and adopt the general timeline of Koryakova and

Epimakhov. Their dates represent well the pattern of emerging iron production in East Asia during the early first millennium BC and the exponential growth in iron artifacts beginning in the mid to late first millennium BC. Like the term empire, I employ the designation of Iron Age with full knowledge of the controversies surrounding its definition and the simultaneous recognition of this nevertheless being one of the more acceptable delineations among those possible.

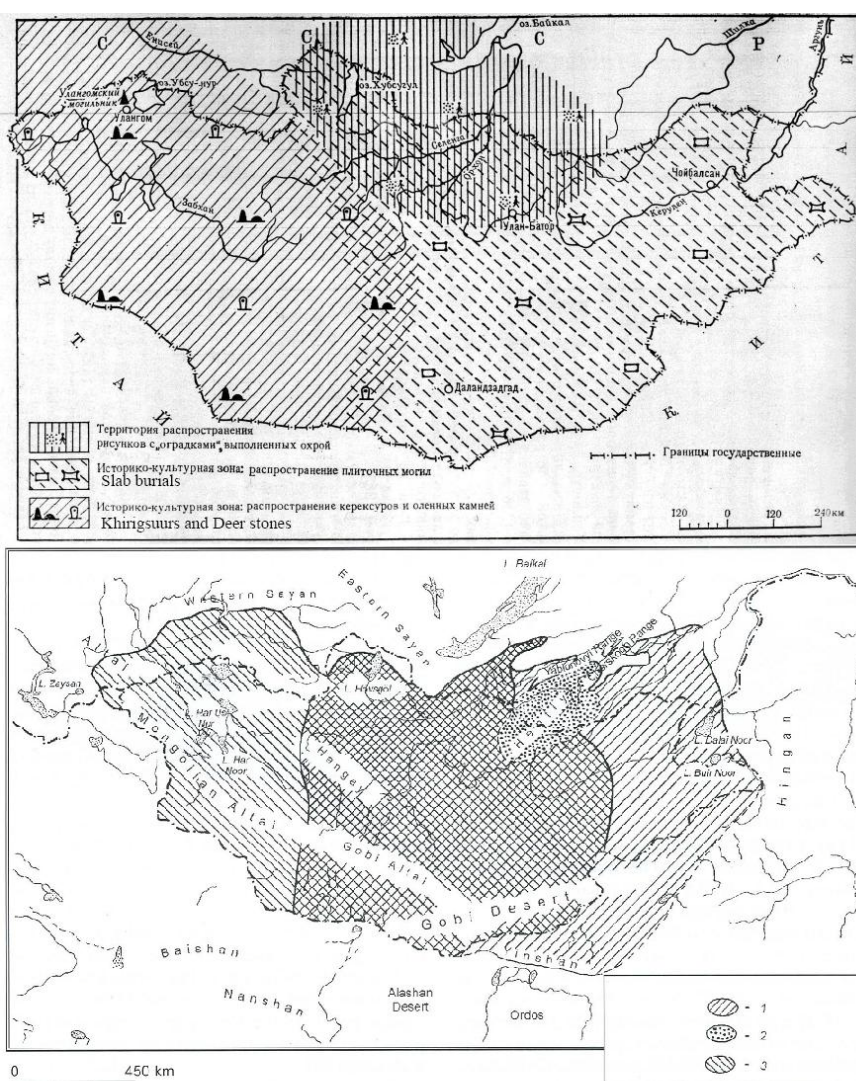


Fig. 1. Central Asian cultural provinces of the Late Bronze - Early Iron Ages.
 1 - Stone-Slab Tomb Culture, 2 - Henty Culture, 3 - Khirgksur Culture.

Fig.6.1 Bronze Age Mongolia according to Novgorodova (1989) and Tsybiktarov (2003)

The Steppe Precedents in the Bronze Age

The traditional picture of late Bronze Age to early Iron Age Mongolia presents a dichotomy between a culture from the west defined by its stone mound complexes (*khirigsuurs*) and a culture from the east defined by its stone slab burials (*dorvoljin bulsh* or “square burials”)⁷⁹ which are relatively contemporaneous and intermixed in central Mongolia (Novgorodova 1989; Volkov 1967) [Fig.6.1]. The more recent rendition by Tsybiktarov (2003) purports a larger area of overlap and proposes a third cultural phenomenon, which did not mix as much with either the *khirigsuur* or slab grave cultures. Reflecting upon both maps of cultures, it seems these Russian archaeologists were each outlining a definitive third culture group related to South Siberia which reflected their own particular areas of research along the northern Mongolian border. The total picture of early first millennium BC Mongolia was likely much more complex than the long-accepted dichotomy.

The relationship between the two sequential and overlapping cultures of *khirigsuurs* and slab graves is exhibited by the intriguing spatial relationship between the features [Fig.6.2].⁸⁰ Slab graves were sometimes added onto the peripheries of the *khirigsuur* complexes in a seeming recognition and exploitation of their monumentality

⁷⁹ The Mongolian word for these burials defines them by their square (*dorvoljin*) shape on the surface, though the standard English word used defines them by the large stone slabs employed in making the burial chamber and the square, or rather rectangular, surface demarcation.

⁸⁰ More recent and refined dates for both of these types of features have shown the *khirigsuur* monuments – dated mostly to the late second millennium BC (Erdenebaatar 2002; Wright 2006; Fitzhugh and Bayarsaikhan 2008) – to precede and lead into the period of the slab graves. The proposed culture of *khirigsuur* stone mound complexes, while exhibiting a high degree of homogeneity in structure and form in central Mongolia (Wright 2006, 2007), do not show the same type of complexity for associated features in sites further west toward and within the Altai. The higher degree of complexity for these stone complexes and greater size in central Mongolia calls into question the concept of a continuity and pure western origins and seems more to be the result of some other dynamics yet to be determined.

(Erdenebaatar 2002; Wright 2006). The importance of these monumental traditions within the steppe, and the ritual intricacies of the complexes, will be underscored later in chapter four. It is also essential to recognize the prominent place of the khirigsuur monuments in the steppe landscape and their overlap with the slab graves. This is important since the later remains of the Iron Age did not occupy the same spaces as either

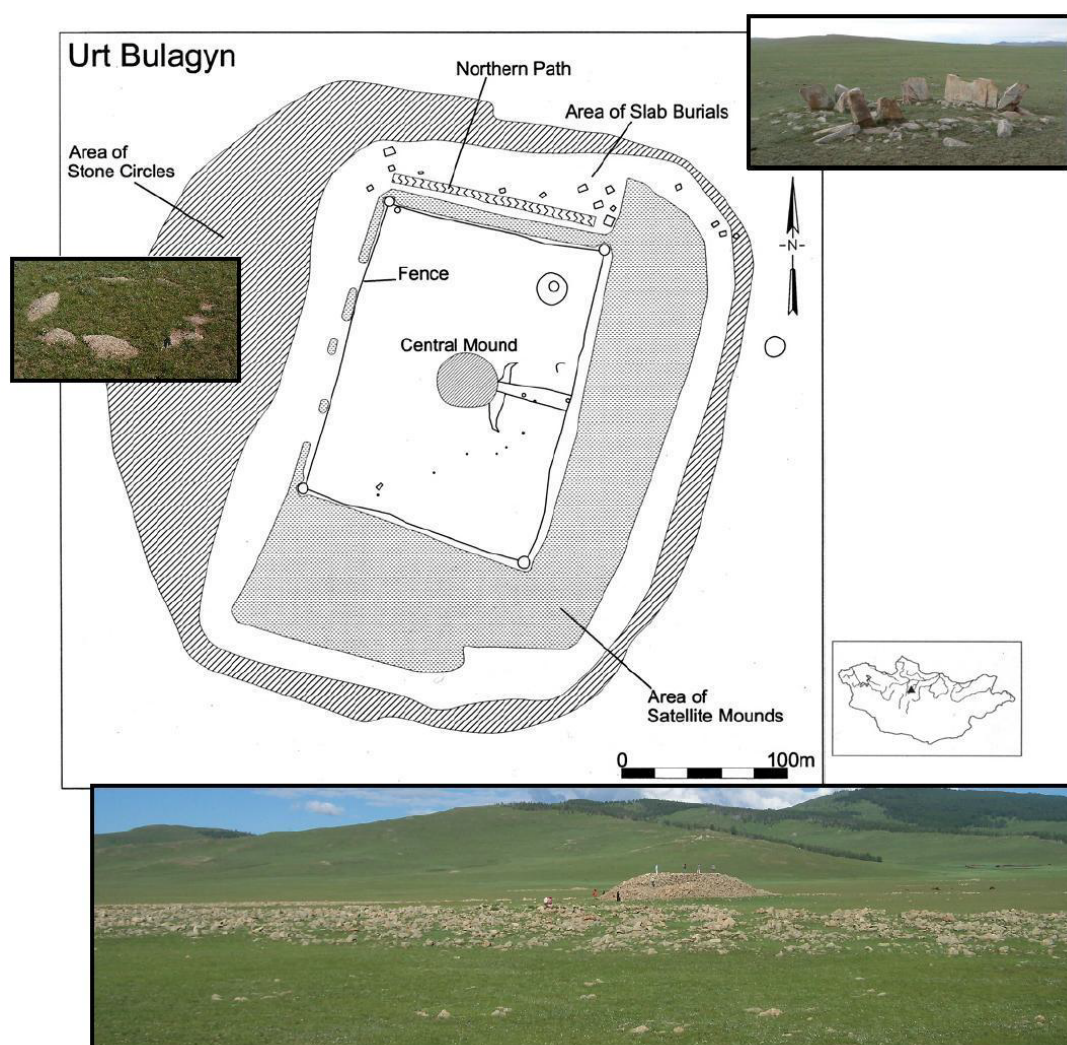


Fig.6.2 Urt Bulagyn khirigsuur complex, Khanuy Valley, Mongolia (drawing from Allard and Erdenebaatar 2005: Fig.6)

of these types of remains. It appears the people who constructed monuments later sought to define new and distinct sacred spaces.

Stone slab graves across eastern and central Mongolia are purported to represent the groups closest to the later Iron Age peoples that inhabited the Mongolian steppes (Torbat 2006), but the regions of Eastern Inner Asia were also inhabited by numerous sizeable groups in northern China and the Ordos region, areas to the west from the Gansu corridor to south eastern Kazakhstan, and the builders of massive stone mounds further northwest in southern Siberia. The outline of these groups and the material culture which represents them, serves to demonstrate tremendous variability at that time. This variability is later replaced by a definitive material culture group which spread over much of the area occupied by these preceding groups. Whether the slab graves may be identified as the precursor to the later Iron Age phenomenon, or the much sought-after origins of the Xiongnu (Torbat 2006), remains to be seen. Regardless, this issue does not help us to understand the inner chronology of the periods of the Xiongnu polity.



Fig.6.3 Slab grave, Khanuy Valley, Central Mongolia

Slab Grave Culture of Eastern and Central Mongolia

Slab graves represent the most significant cultural group in central and east Mongolia before the large states of the Iron Age steppes (Erdenebaatar 2002; Tsybiktarov 1998; Navaan 1975; Dikov 1958). The most recent absolute dates place them in the early through mid first millennium BC (Wright 2006; Torbat et al. 2003), overlapping with the time span of the previous khirigsuur monuments. They consist of shallow stone lined pits marked by rectangular arrangements of large stone slabs [Fig.6.3]. They usually face east, and for the most part contain single inhumations. Buried with them are the heads and limbs of horses and sheep/goat as well as horse riding gear. The rest of the burial assemblage consists of bronze knives, arrowheads, and the rare helmet, as well as bronze mirror disks and a wide assortment of small personal ornaments [Fig.6.4]. The “pie-crust” rimmed ceramics interred in the slab graves comprise the most distinctive artifact type of the slab grave culture and have been used in settlement surveys to ascertain the nature and relative date of habitation sites (Wright 2006; Houle 2009).

The relatively small impression on the landscape left by these graves should be noted, and has been documented in the excavations and surveys in the Egiin gol valley of northern Mongolia (Wright 2006; Torbat et al. 2003; Honeychurch 2004) [Fig.6.5]. They are small in size – only a few meters long – small in the number of burials per site – numbering only a handful or even solitary examples at a time – and small in the amount of burial sites across the steppes. Furthermore, the minute amount of excavations conducted on these grave sites makes a full understanding of the society associated with them rather difficult. Preliminary research in the Egiin gol valley has asserted the slab graves, in their placement and inventory, to retain indications of status differentiation

(Honeychurch 2004: 126-127), and the age and sex distribution appears to represent a complete population rather than just the “warriors” (Wright 2006: 276). While these may include women and children, the small number of graves and small size of burial grounds allow an interpretation that all members only of a particular social stratum are represented. This calls into question the claim of commoner burials for this period and many other periods in the steppes, a matter which shall be revisited later.



Fig.6.4 Slab grave culture (after Moshkova 1992: 451-453)

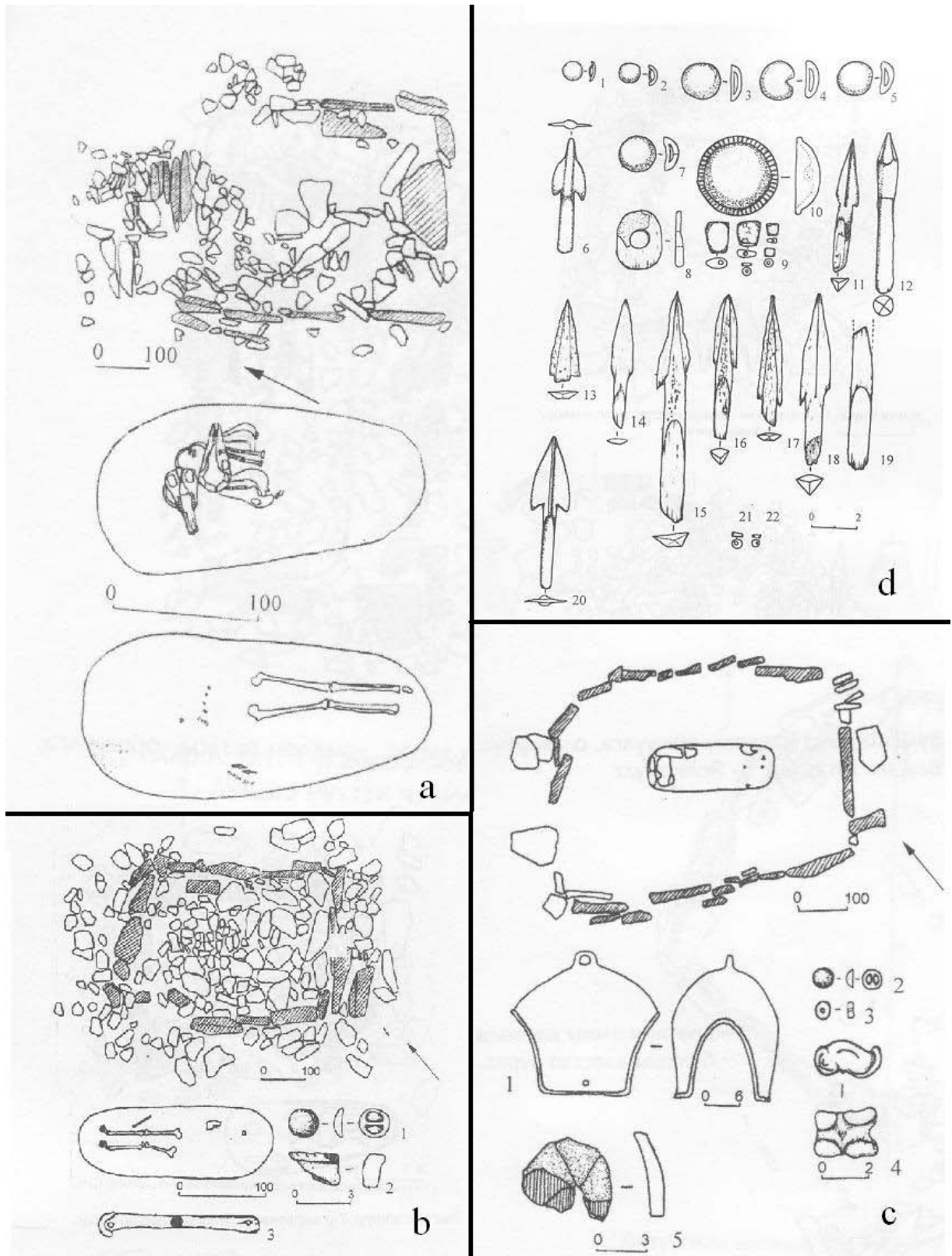


Fig.6.5 Slab graves, Egiin gol valley (Torbat et al. 2003: 159,167,168,163)

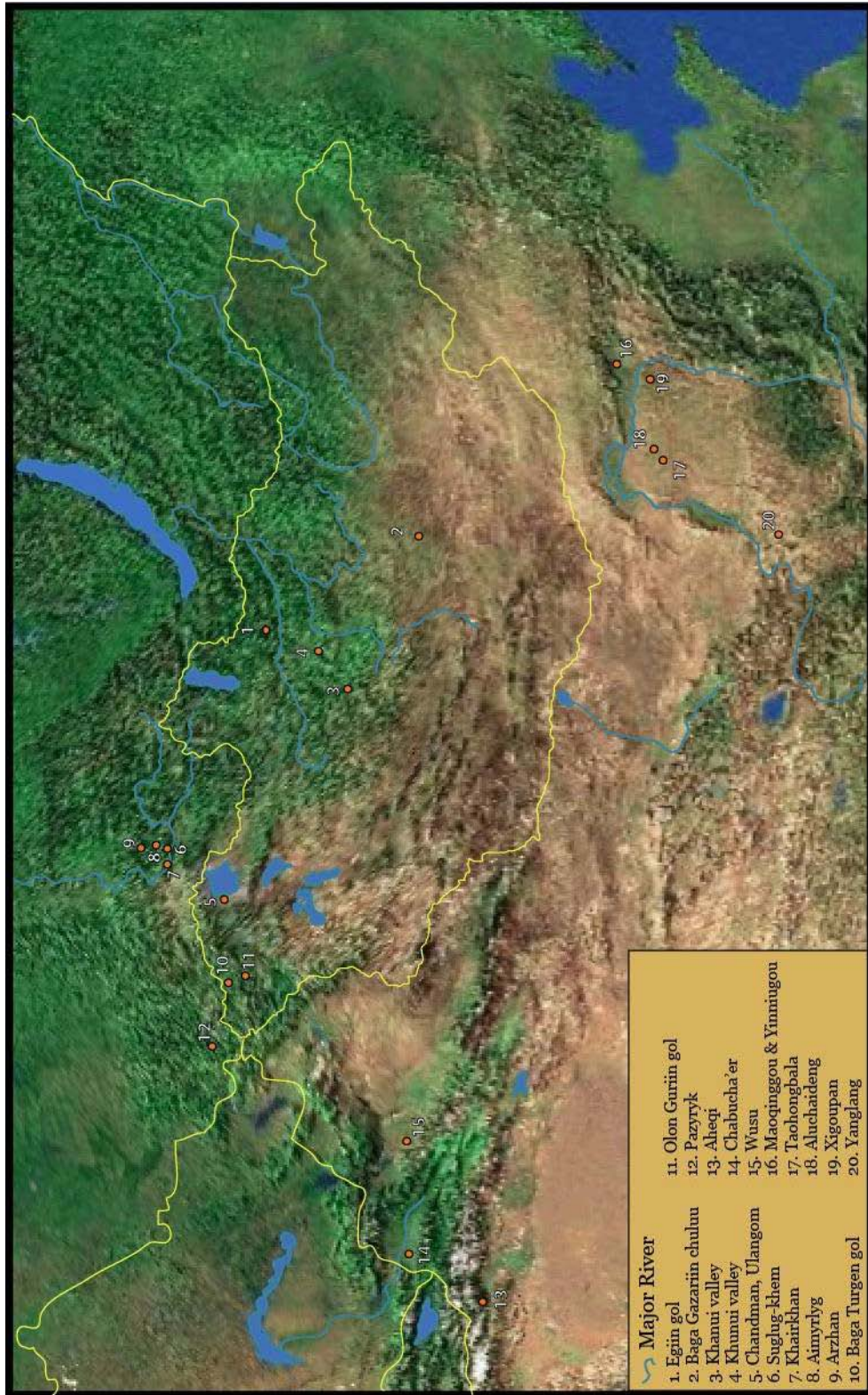


Fig. 6.6 Late Bronze and Early Iron Age Sites of the Mongolian Steppes and Surrounding Areas

Kurgans of the North: South Siberia and the Altai

Stone mound graves (*kurgans*) have been documented and excavated from the Mongolian Altai (Erdenebaatar and Kovalev 2007) to north central Mongolia (Amgalantogs et al. 2007) and their chronologies seem to span equally as broad. While many of them date to the second millennium BC – the same time as the khirigsuur monuments – a large portion also date as late as the fifth to third centuries BC (Amgalantogs et al. 2007), and it is these late first millennium BC burials which relate closest to the present study. These are stone mounds several meters wide with single interments within or just below the stone mound in a simple earthen pit. They may relate to other preceding mound cultures, but they should be considered typologically separate as well as separate from the slab graves found in eastern and central Mongolia.

Some of the remains northwest of the Mongolian steppes have been labeled part of the “Pazyryk Culture” (7th to 3rd centuries BC)⁸¹, according to the type-site of Pazyryk (Rudenko 1970) in the Russian Altai near the Mongolian border. Sites related to this phenomenon have been found in the southern reaches of the Yenesei River in Tuva, the northern reaches of the Altai Mountains of Mongolia, and nearby Uvs Lake in northwestern Mongolia. Several cultural names have been ascribed – Uyük Culture (Moshkova 1992; Novgorodova et al. 1982), Chandman Culture (Tseveendorj 1980) – but we may easily identify this region of South Siberia as exhibiting drastically different traditions from elsewhere in Mongolia. This is manifested in a distinct local assemblage of bronze knives, socketed axe-heads, ceramic wide-belly narrow-neck jars, and hanging

⁸¹ Carbon-14 dates have placed the sites in Tuva between the fifth to third centuries BC (Semenov 2003). The more recent dates for the tombs at Pazyryk are now given as mid fourth to mid third century BC (Zaitseva and Bokovenko 2005: 165-169).

bronze “mirror” disks in addition to the same burial rites a preponderance for flexed burials and multiple interments. The smaller graves are compact stone cists with flexed burials, often several at a time, interred with an assortment of the standard jars, knives, and/or mirrors [Fig.6.7,8].

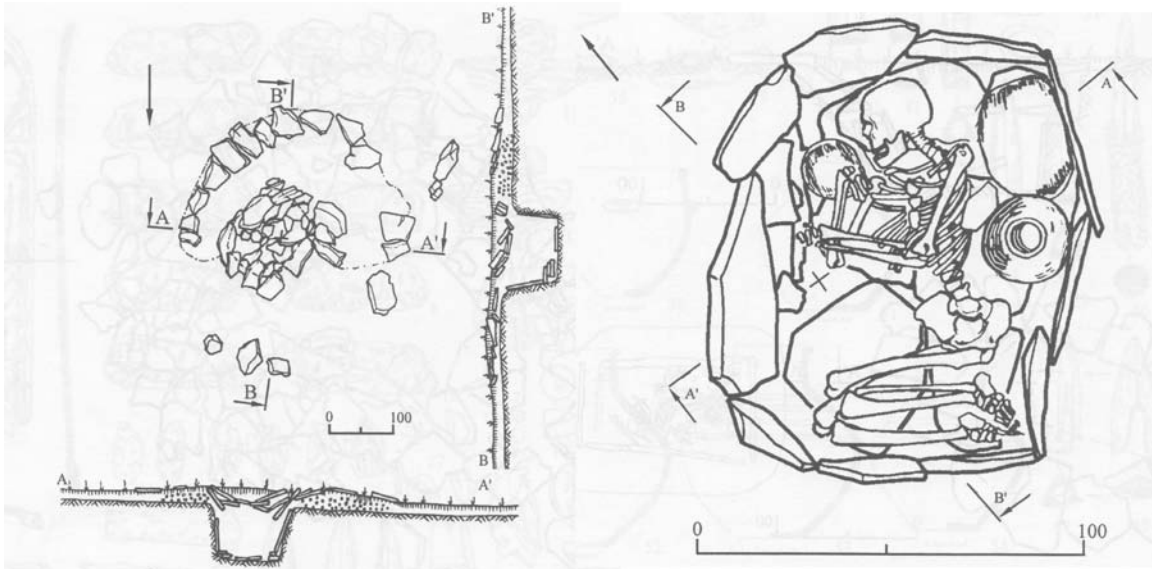


Fig.6.7 Suglug-khem I grave 9 (Semenov 2003: Fig.66)

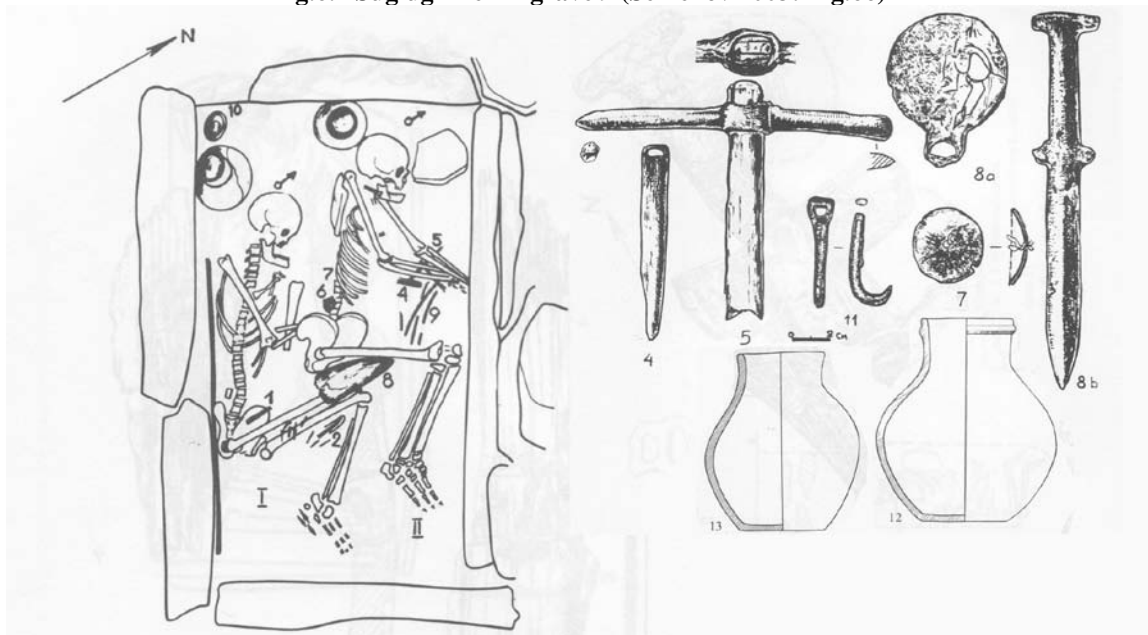


Fig.6.8 Chandman grave 53 (Novgorodova et al. 1982: fig.69)

The majority of the graves are marked by *kurgan* mounds of stone. Some of these contain several separate stone cists beneath the stone constructions [Fig.6.9], but most contained a single chamber, at times with an additional small stone cist above or beside the main chamber [Figs.6.10,11]. A number of kurgans in Tuva of the fifth to third centuries BC, labeled as “Uyuk Culture,” contained thickly lined singular stone chambers with numerous flexed people (Moshkova ed. 1992: 185). Within Tuva and across other surrounding regions, the majority of kurgans of this time period contained wood chambers constructed from large notched logs interlocked to form the walls, the floors of which were of wood or paved stone [Figs.6.12,13]. Whether containing large wooden chambers, or a collection of separate stone cists, the interment of multiple people in one grave seems one of the most indicative characteristics of these burials. The deceased in each case are a mix of men, women and children. A number of kurgans attributed to the so-called Pazyryk culture were excavated at Baga Turgen gol (Torbat et al. 2005, 2007) and Olon Guriin gol (Tseveendorj et al. 2007) in the northern reaches of the Mongolian Altai and yielded wooden chambers with either a few people or a single person, often with one or two entire horse skeletons placed alongside the chamber [Figs.6.14,15]. The occurrence of individual burials beneath the kurgans differs from the chambers with numerous individuals, but the log chamber construction, position of the body, and collection of pottery and weaponry seems relatively consistent.

Some of the graves at the Pazyryk type-site, and a few at the nearby cemetery of Aragol, resemble those in Bayan-Ulgii of northwestern Mongolia described above – small stone mounds overtop log chambers with a handful of flexed inhumations and whole horses interred in the pit alongside the wooden chambers [Fig.6.16]. The larger

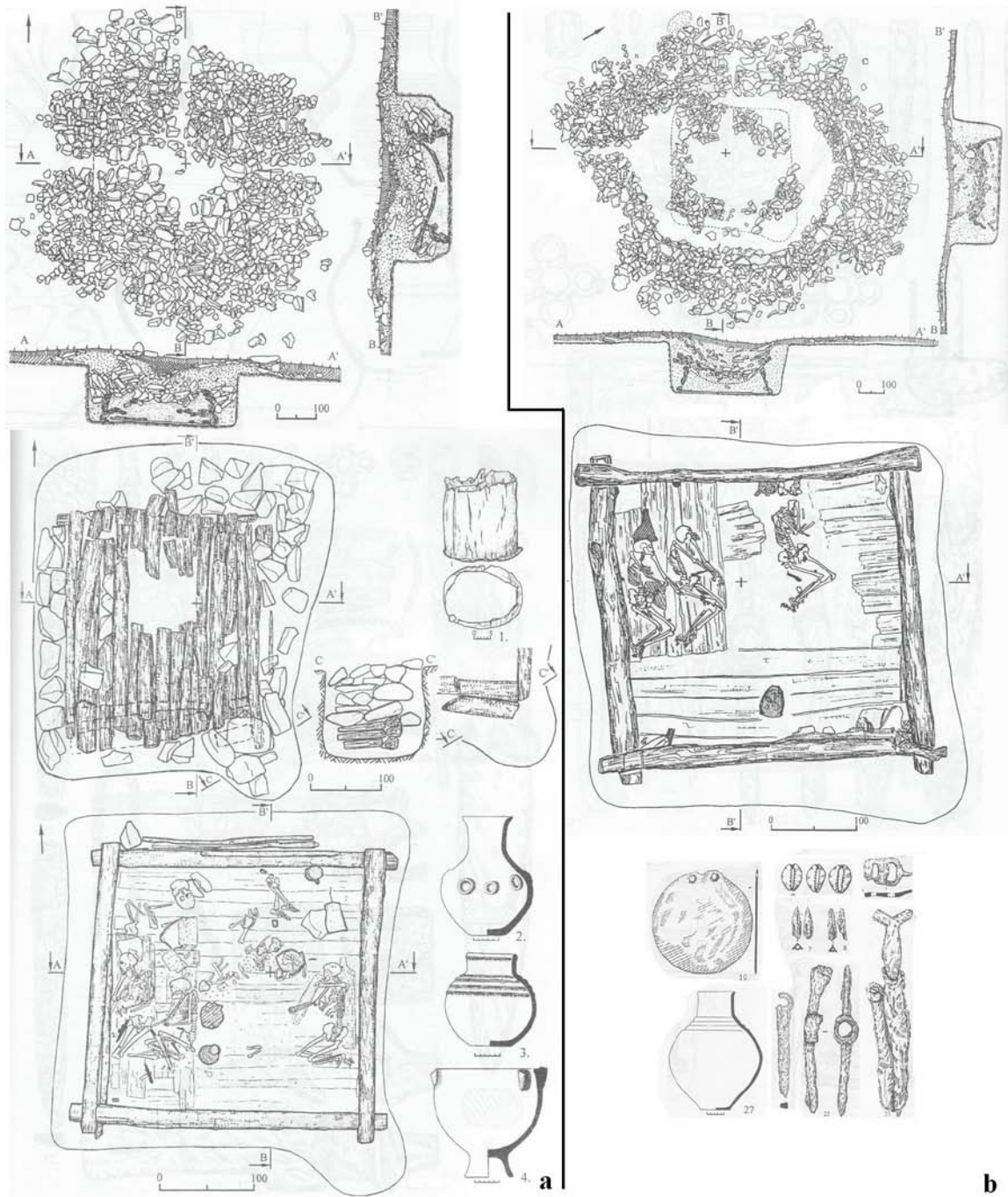


Fig.6.9 Khayrakan V grave 1 (Semenov 2003: fig.86)

b

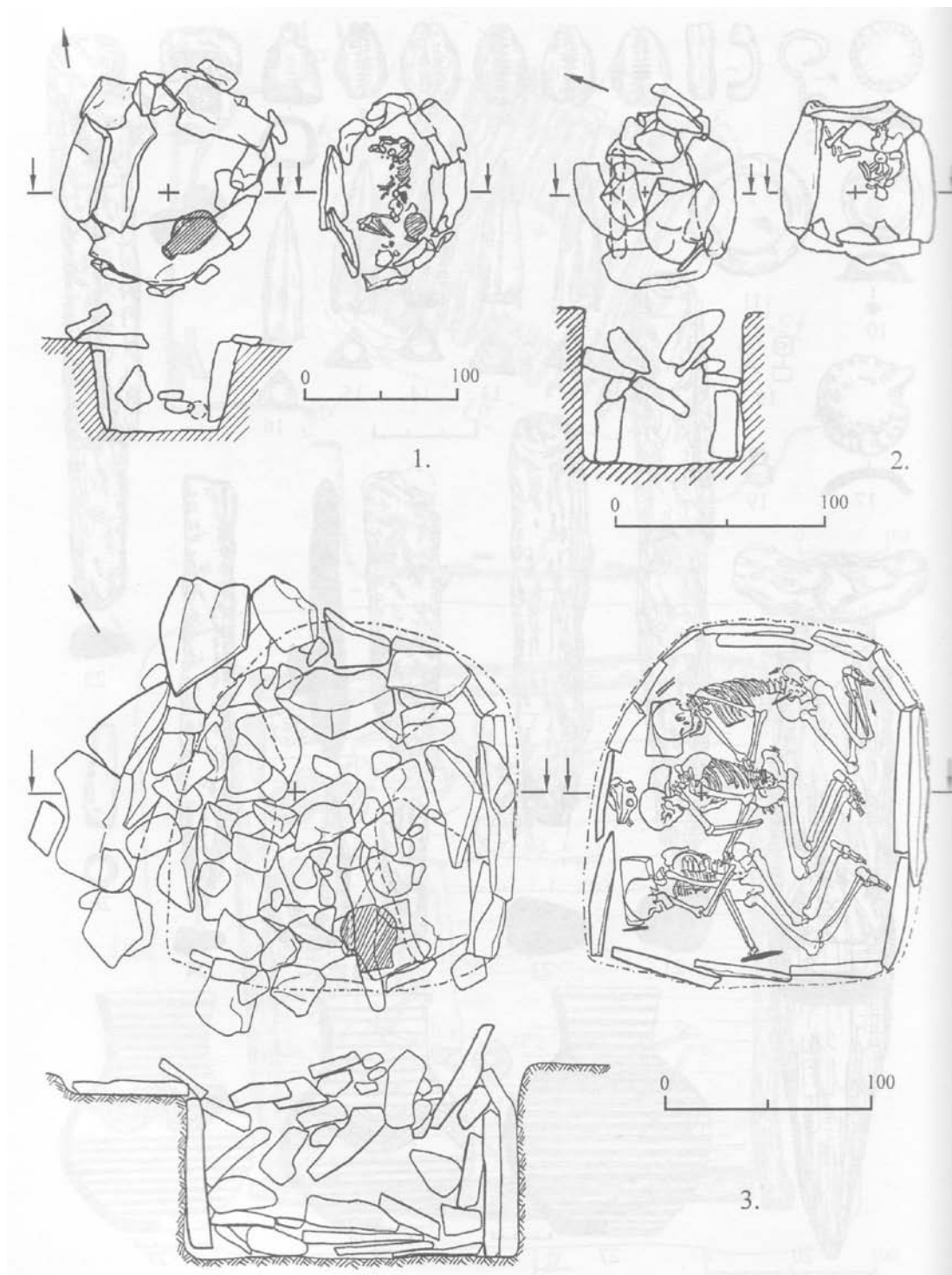


Fig.6.10 Chandman grave 14 (Tseveendorj 1980: figs.15-17)

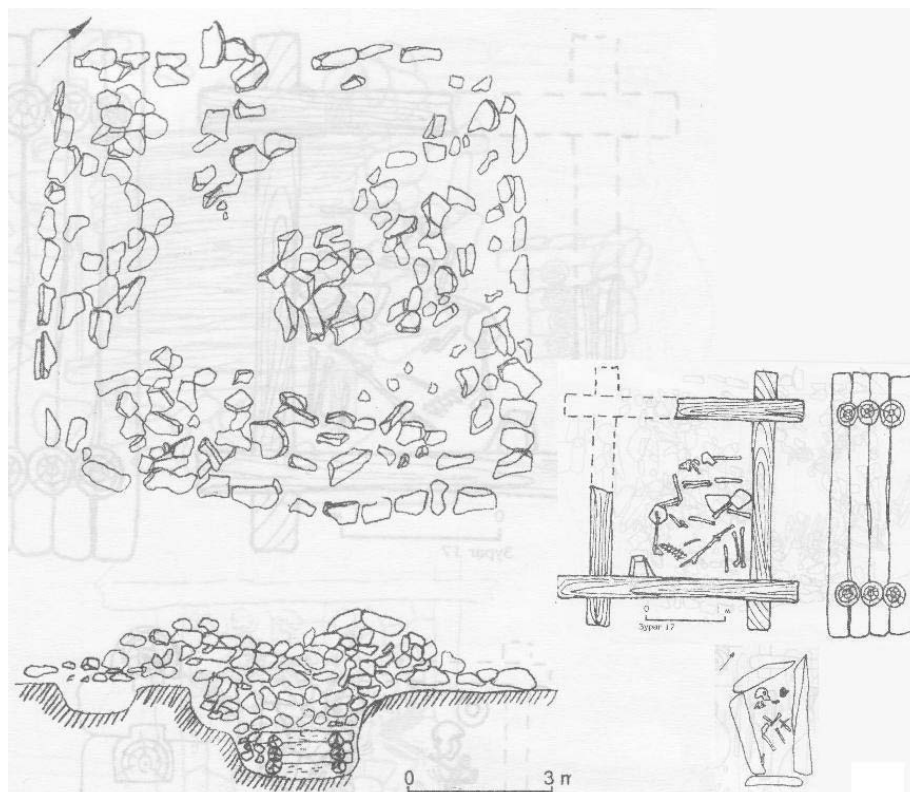


Fig.6.11 Khayrakan V grave 3 and Suglug-khem I grave 28 (Semenov 2003: figs.74-75, 30-31)

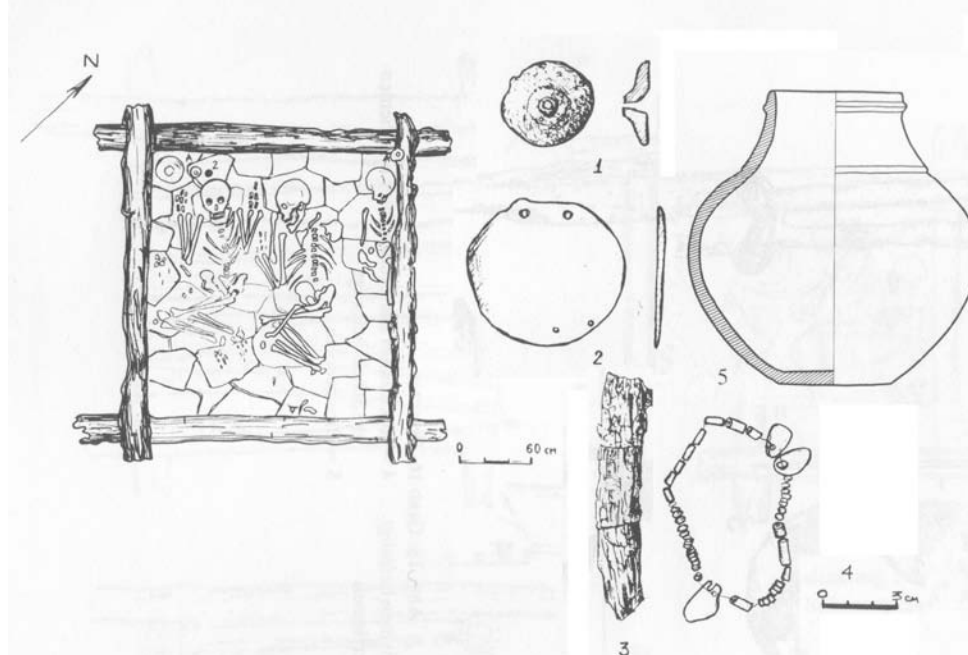


Fig.6.12 Chandman 17 (Novgorodova et al. 1982: fig.19)

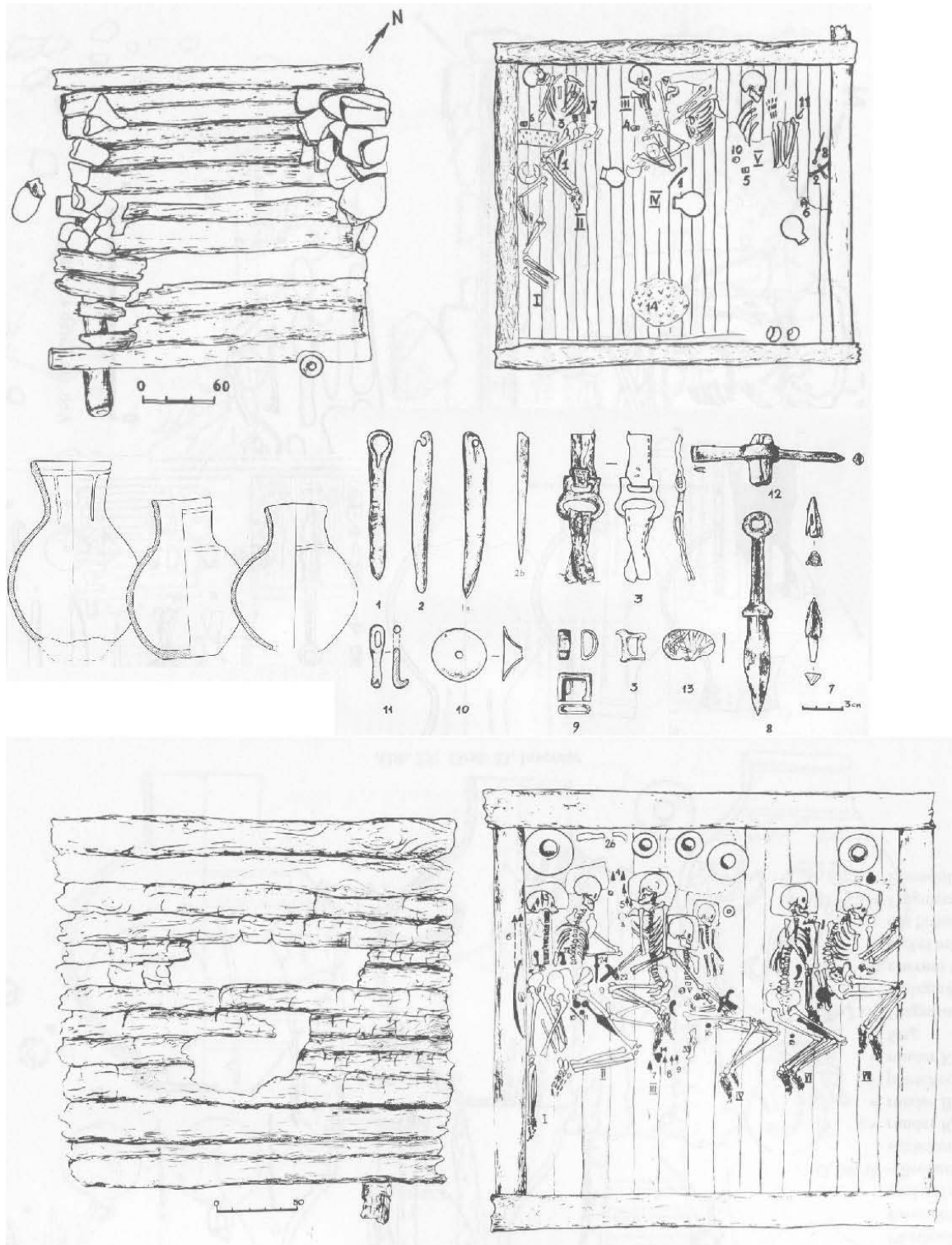


Fig.6.13 Chandman graves 46 and 23 (Novgorodova et al. 1982: figs.61,24)

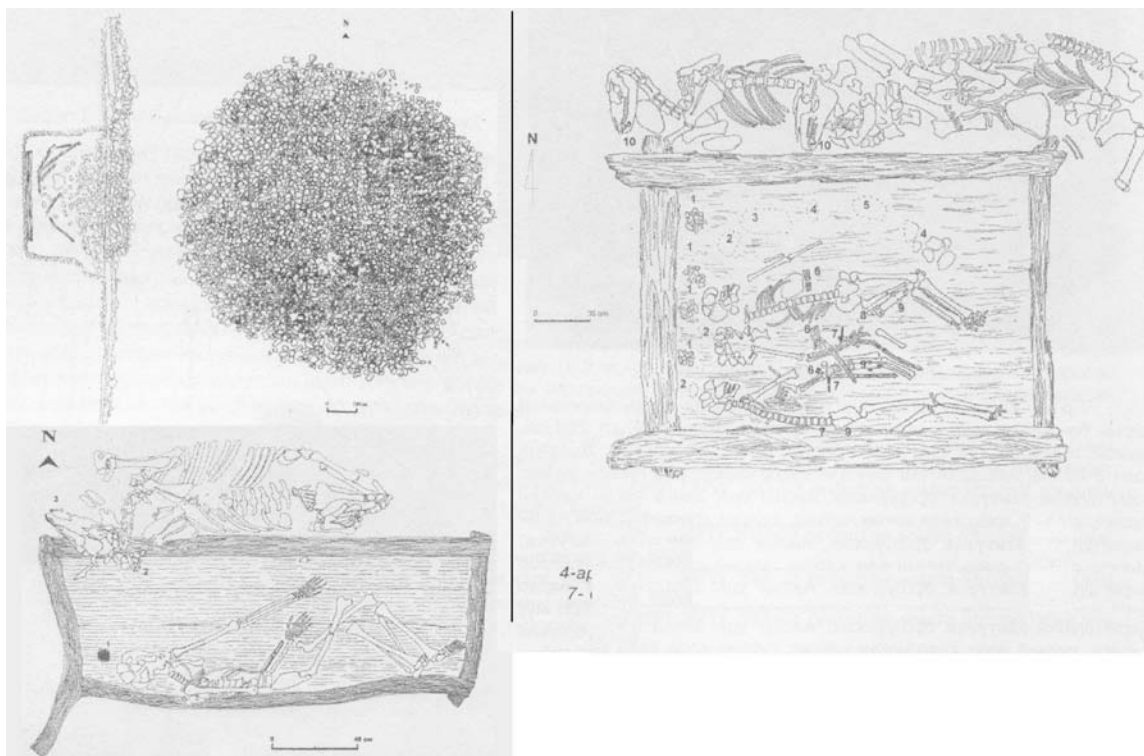


Fig.6.14 Baga Turgen gol graves 1 and 2 (Torbat et al 2005: 40,42,48)

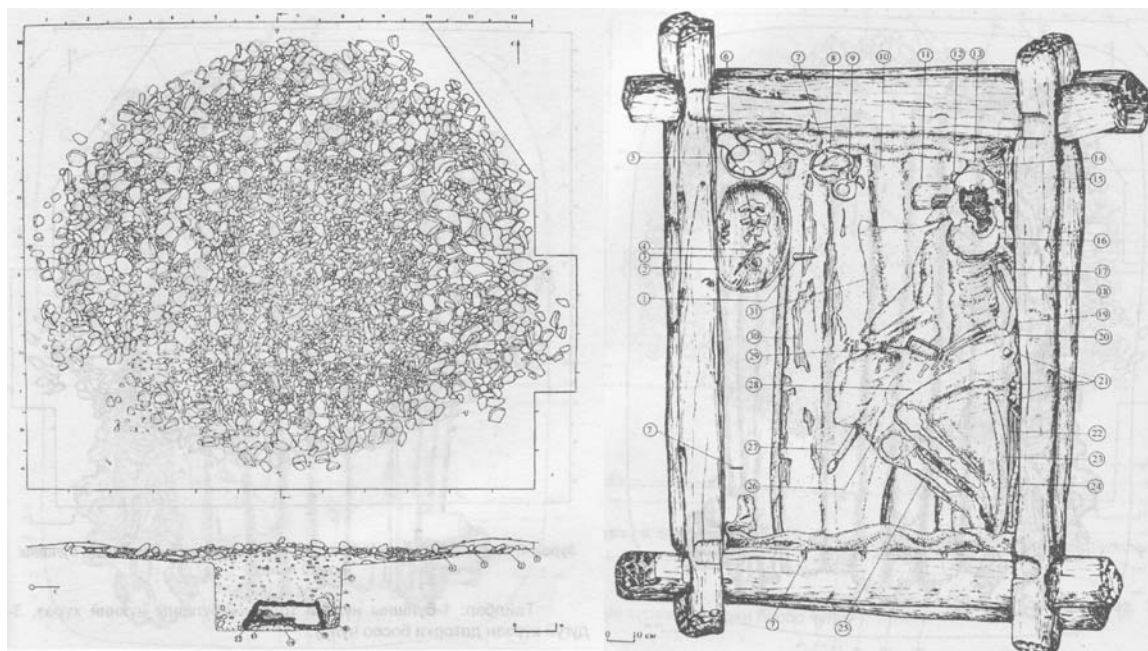
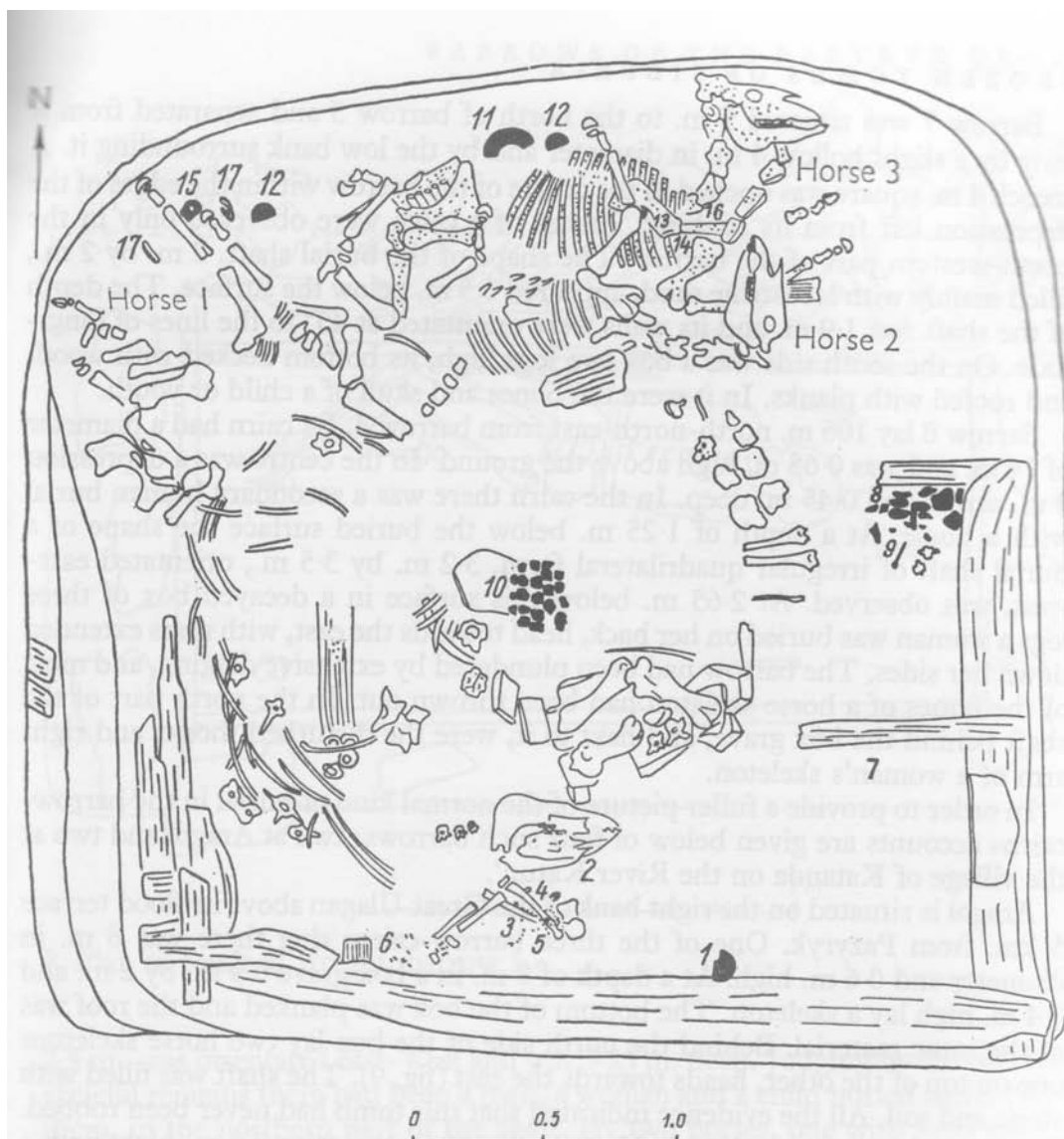


Fig.6.15 Olon Guriin gol grave 10 (Tseveendorj et al. 2007: 183,186)



8. Plan of tomb in barrow 6.

1, Chinese mirror; 2, 3 and 6, beads; 4, cowrie shell; 5, red lacquer; 7, gold beads; 8 and 10, earthenware bottles; 9, knife; 11 and 12, antler saddle plaques; 13-16, antler saddle pendants; 17, gold leaf.

Fig.6.16 Pazyryk grave 6 (Rudenko 1970: 25)

kurgans at Pazyryk were constructed with more intricate chambers, though the same manner of log-cut construction, and held only one or two people. Beneath massive stone mounds, were found double log chambers with heavy log columns supporting a wooden

roof over top. Within the inner log chambers were laid round cut-log coffins amongst extravagant assemblages of burial goods, including carpets, an array of wood ornaments, and, in the case of grave 5, an embroidered silk hanging from China. Outside the chamber of grave 5 was also found a complete covered vehicle [Fig.6.17]. The scale and splendor of the larger kurgans attest to the power held by the leaders in South Siberia during the fourth and third centuries BC, and more importantly for the discussion of later Iron Age material, illustrates significant traditions of monumentality in burials and elaborate burial chambers and burial goods assemblages.

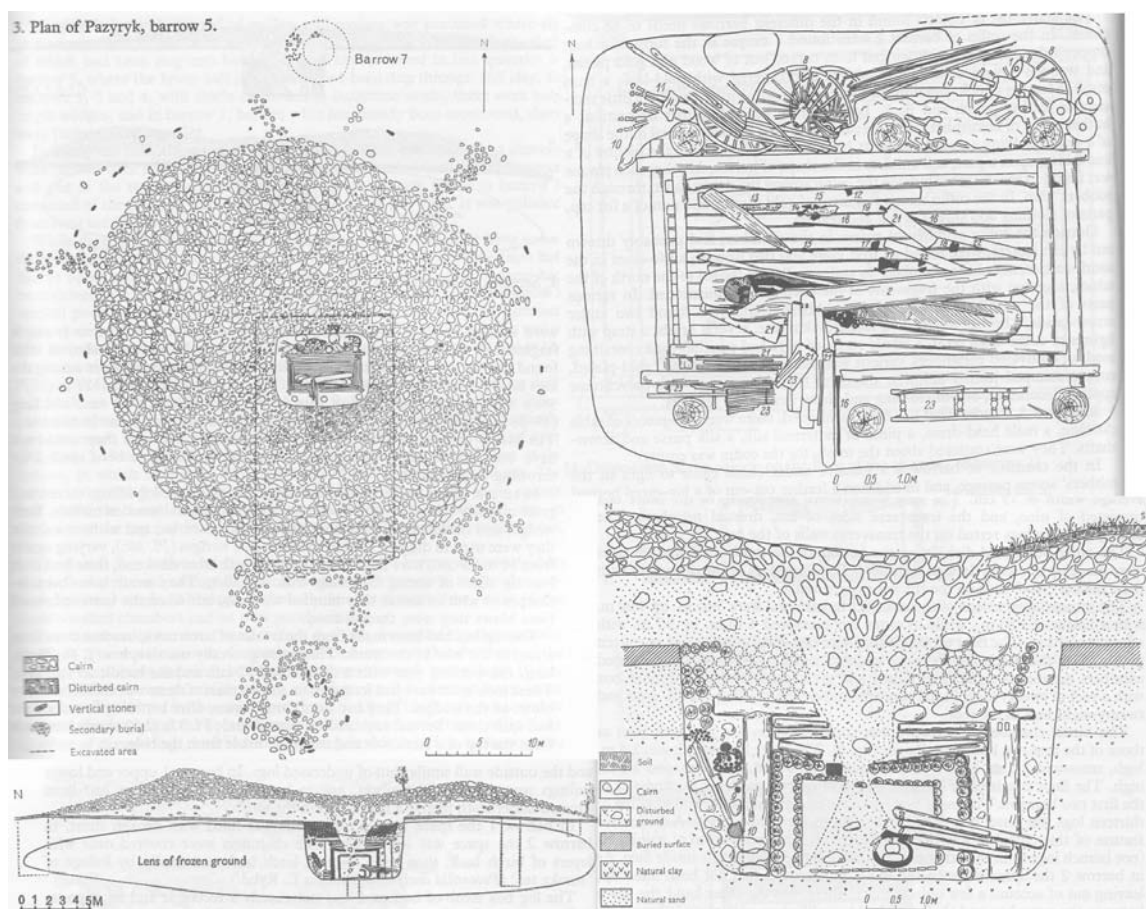


Fig.6.17 Pazyryk grave 5 (Rudenko 1970: 15,20,38,43)

Kurgans of the West: Kazakhstan and Xinjiang

Although the graves discussed here do not appear to have encroached upon the Mongolian steppes or even closely bordered them, they represent a group in southeastern Kazakhstan and the western edges of Xinjiang that appear to have existed from the mid-late first millennium BC and carried on through to the early first millennium AD without significant change to the form of their burials. They would most likely have represented a significant force with which any entity in the Mongolian steppes that pushed westward would have interacted, traded, and conflicted.

These burials of the so-called Western Regions yielded ornaments of precious metals [Fig.6.18], and distinct forms of pitchers and loop-handle cups and bowls [Figs.6.18,19], the latter of which sets them apart from their northern and eastern neighbors. These burials, like those in South Siberia, were marked by kurgans of stone or stone and earth, some of them as large as twenty or thirty meters. Beneath the mounds were shaft pits often with no chamber structure [Fig.6.18]. A large number of them had an extra side niche into which the body was placed, sometimes closed off with a leaning stone slab [Fig.6.19]. At times these kurgans did contain furnished chambers, as evidenced by the wooden coffers at Wusu, Xinjiang 烏蘇新疆 (Xinjiang yanjiusuo 1996). Here, also are examples of double burials – kurgan mounds with two adjoined pits, each with a single interment [Fig.6.20]. Though surmounted by stone mounds, these kurgan burials centered around the Tianshan Mountains and Yili River Valley, appear to represent a different culture from those in South Siberia, as evidenced by the lack of

single chamber multiple interments, the disparate form of burial chamber, and the starkly different ceramics tradition.

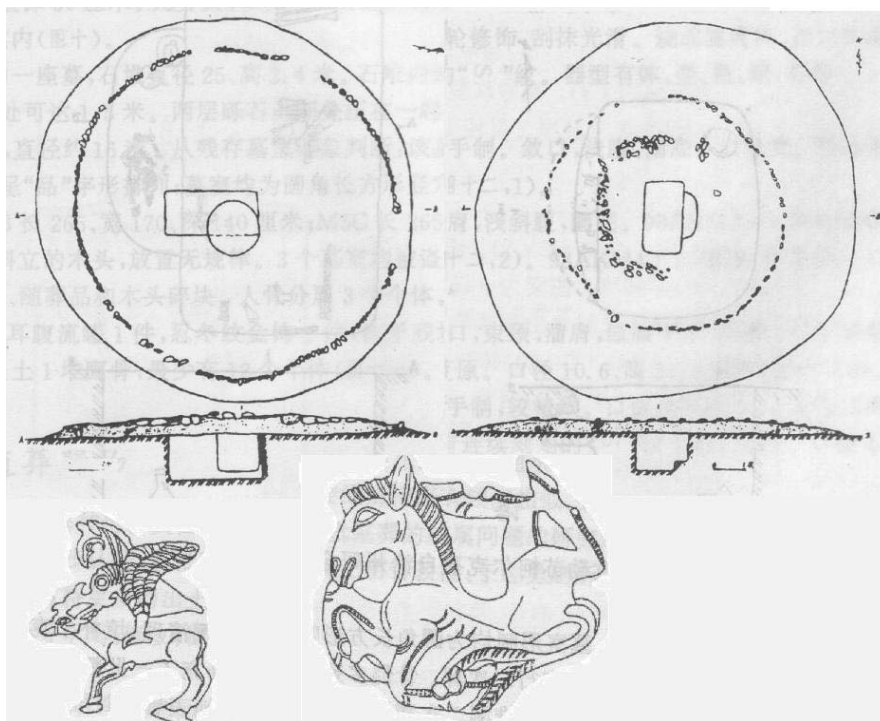


Fig.6.18 Aheqi graves 1 & 2 (Xinjiang 1995.2: figs.5,7,13)

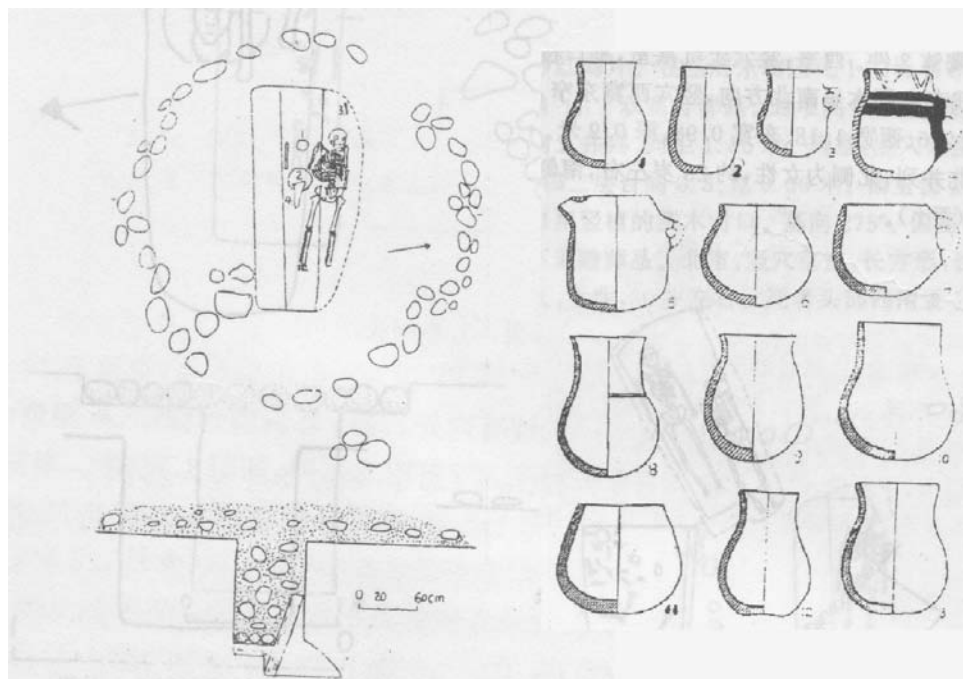


Fig.6.19 ChabuCha'er grave and ceramics (Xinjiang 1995.2: fig.2,11)

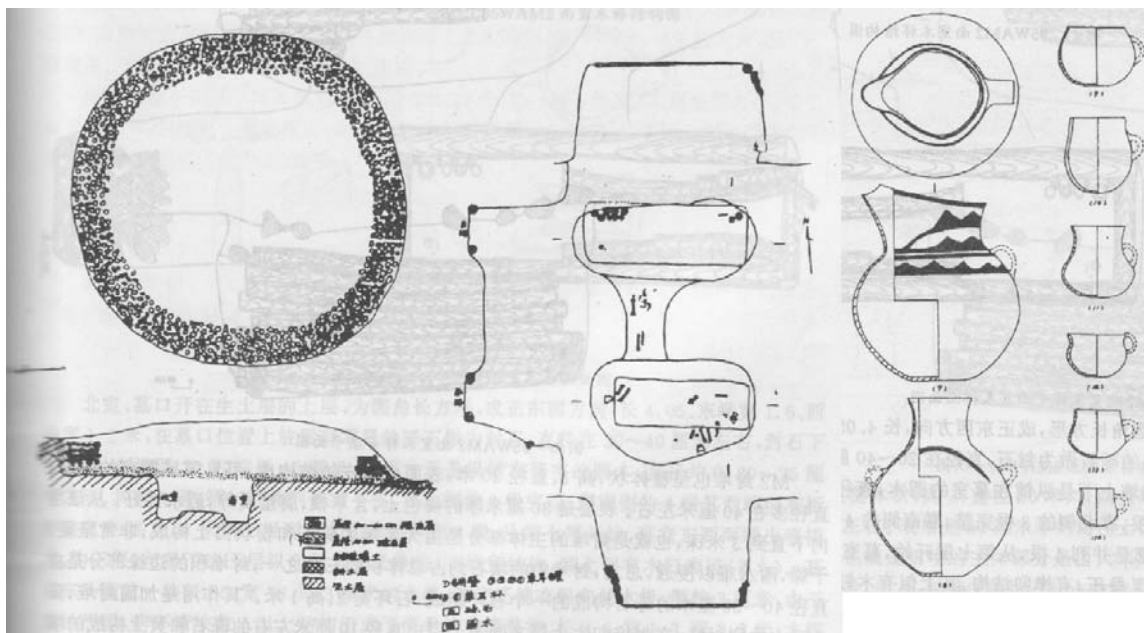


Fig.6.20 Wusu grave and ceramics (Xinjiang 1996.4: figs.7,8,12)

The Frontier Belt of Northern China

The late Bronze Age to early Iron Age cultures of northern China is admittedly an exhaustive topic about which many an article and book have been written (Wu En 2007, 2008; Shelach 2005; Yang 2004; Di Cosmo 2002; Tian and Guo 1986 to name just a few). The first of Wu En Yuesitu's (2007) most recent compendiums arranges the vast array of sites in this northern zone into over a dozen discernable cultural traditions, and his subsequent volume (Wu En 2008) more directly addresses the connections within this frontier between the Chinese Central Plains and the Inner Asian steppes further north. The flow of technology and artistic traditions (Shelach 2005), luxury items (exemplified by the Chinese goods as far as the Pazyryk graves), and the spread of pastoral economic strategies (Chifeng 2003) all indicate a high degree of interaction and interconnection within the frontier. Yang (2004) characterizes the Chinese "northern belt" as progressing through several stages, during the Bronze to Iron Age transition, of increased cultural,

technological, and economic similarities, but admits that burial customs continued to be heterogeneous, evidencing the persistence of distinct local groups.

The three culture groups are labeled by type-sites as Maoqinggou 毛慶溝 just north of the northern bend of the Yellow River, Taohongbala 桃紅巴拉 just within the northern bend, and Yanglang 楊郎 further south near the eastern edge of the Gansu corridor (Wu En 2007: 300,322,357). These all date up to the fourth and third centuries BC and comprise the latest Northern Zone sites attributed to the Bronze Age⁸². The site of Maoqinggou bears a collection of graves with mixed orientation, grave furnishing, and burial assemblages, as does the extensively excavated site of Yinniugou 飲牛溝 (Nei Menggu gongzuodui 1984). The graves of the later period include the heads and hooves of livestock and the ceramics become more streamlined toward the realm of basic jars and pots. The authors of the Maoqinggou report have supposed that changes over time in the burial offerings and accompaniments indicate a shift from an agricultural to pastoral way of life (Nei Menggu gongzuodui 1986: 303-4) and settlement pattern surveys in the area have corroborated this supposition (Indrisano 2006). Interestingly, the occupation of the site ends no later than the end of the Warring States period, during the rise of the new Qin 秦 Empire (late 3rd century BC) and its territorial expansions.

⁸² The attempt to label each of these varied cultural groups with names from the texts is criticized by Wu En (2007) as an exercise which, since the names mentioned involve scant or fluid uses, does not inherently increase our understanding of the nature of the developments which occurred between the steppe groups during this transitional period of the first millennium BC. He chooses instead to adopt the archaeological standard of assigning names from a single type-site to larger groups of similar material culture.

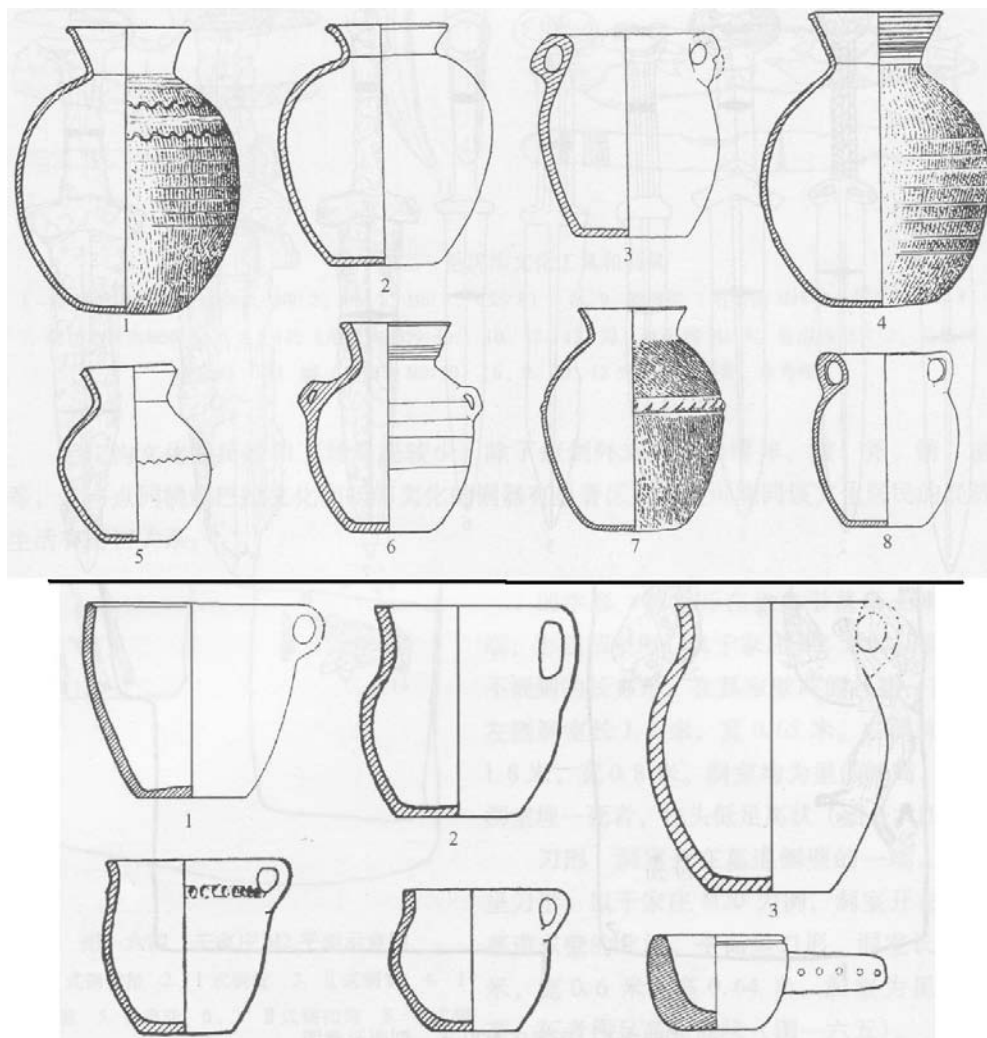


Fig.6.21 Maoqinggou Culture and Yanglang Culture ceramics (Wu En 2007: 307,366)

The sites belonging to the Taohongbala group – among them the more well-known lavishly adorned graves at Aluchaideng 阿魯柴登 (Tian and Guo 1980a) and Xigoupan 西溝畔 (Yikezhaomeng 1980, 1981a; Tian and Guo 1980b) – constitute the most noteworthy presence of mobile steppe groups at the beginning of the Iron Age. Yet, despite the luxuriant inclusions, the number of these graves is relatively small, as is the size of the burials and the area within the northern bend of the Yellow River which this cultural group encompasses. The number of sites attributed to the Yanglang culture just

to the west in Ningxia province is far greater (Wu En 2007: 357-362) though these also taper off during the third century BC. The catacomb, or niche, grave pit structure at these sites is radically different from those of the Ordos region mentioned above, and the placement of animal remains on broad ledges and the style of jug ceramics are amply different [Fig.6.21].

Despite the flow of goods and technology, there remained an extreme cultural diversity – mostly in terms of burial style and ceramics traditions – in this region up through the late Bronze Age. This frontier zone was neither part of the Central Plains cultural sphere nor directly part of the steppe, but rather a region with its own intermixed characteristics which sat between these larger regions (Yang 2004). Despite changes in the Chinese Central Plains, the northern steppes, and within this frontier zone, there continued to be a high level of fluidity in the area of the Great Wall throughout the time of the Iron Age empires.

Material Culture of the Iron Age Steppe Groups

The wide distribution of graves linked to a single cultural phenomenon in the early Iron Age has begged the question of the origin of this phenomenon. Wu En's (2008: 343-350) review of the archaeological and art historical theories draws attention to the singular nature of each theory. Rather than proposing that northern China (Taohongbala and other sites), eastern Mongolia (the slab grave culture), or southern Siberia (small round kurgans) alone are the origin of the graves seen across the Mongolian steppes starting in the 2nd century BC, Wu En (2008: 345) proposes a multi-cultural origin. Given the degree of overlap and interaction seen in Bronze Age central Mongolia, a concept of

multiple lines of origins for the new cultural phenomenon seems most appropriate. The origin of the material culture should not, however, be confused with questions of ethnicity or the paleoanthropological question of the origin of the people who were buried within those graves.

Vessel Traditions

Vessel forms, styles, manufacture and overall typologies often form the basis of chronologies and cultural delineations. They reflect food ways, customs and, more importantly, subtle stylistic choices that may be used to differentiate societies which shared similar economies and vocabularies of prestige goods, as did the Inner Asian steppe groups. Similarities between the ceramics of the Slab Grave culture and the Iron Age groups of Mongolia and South Siberia form the foundation of some of the strongest arguments made for continuity between the two cultures (Dorjsuren 1961). The typologies and assemblages derived depend greatly upon the contexts of the samples used for analysis. One of the more significant differences in samples relates to the divide between settlement and mortuary contexts. Those vessels interred with the deceased may only be a small selection from a broader assortment that occurs in daily uses, or, conversely, they may consist of vessel types reserved specifically for ritual contexts such as the burial of the dead. The ideal condition is to be able to compare samples from both contexts to discern how representative the vessels in mortuary contexts are of the lives and traditions of the people who are burying and being buried.

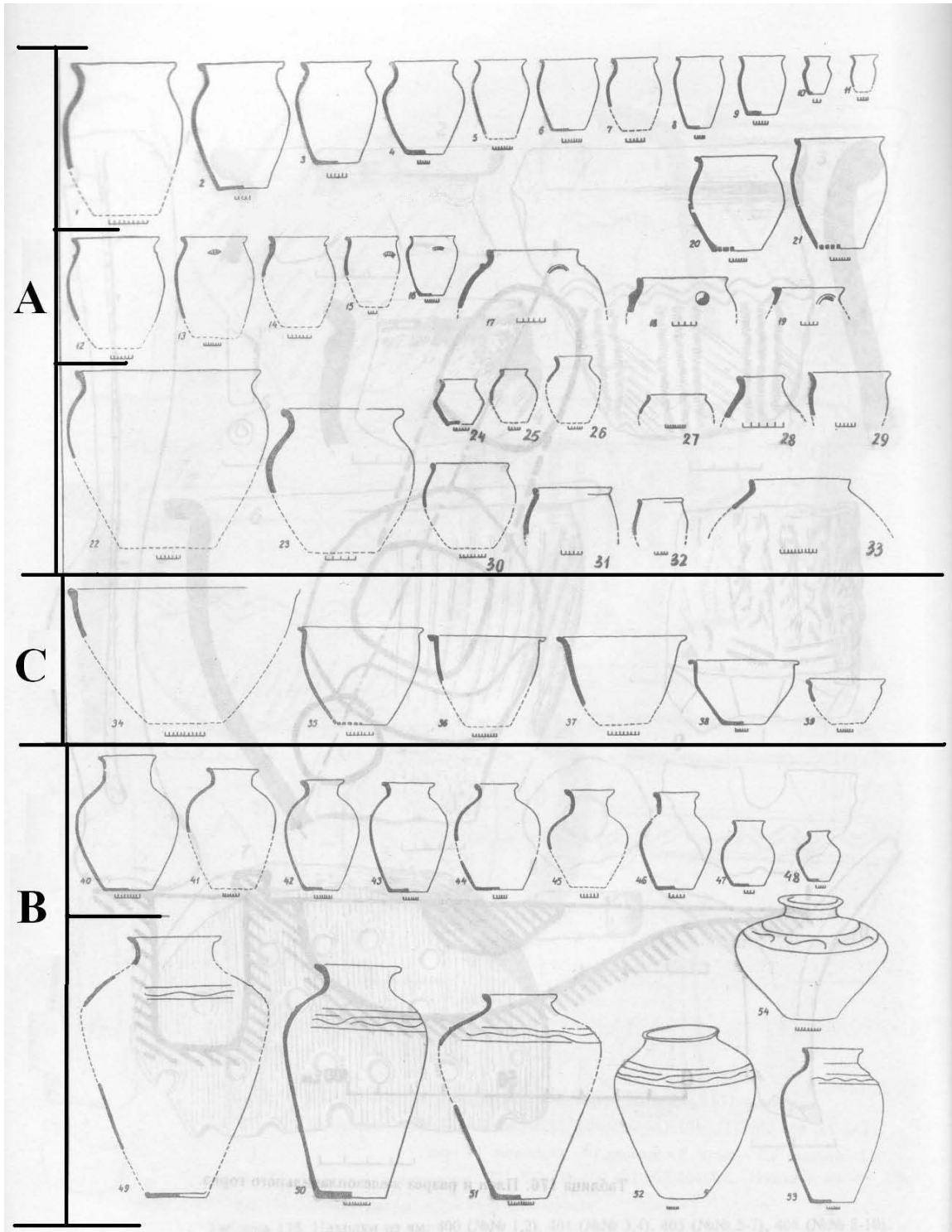


Fig.6.22a Ceramic Vessels from Ivolga (Davydova 1995: fig.177)

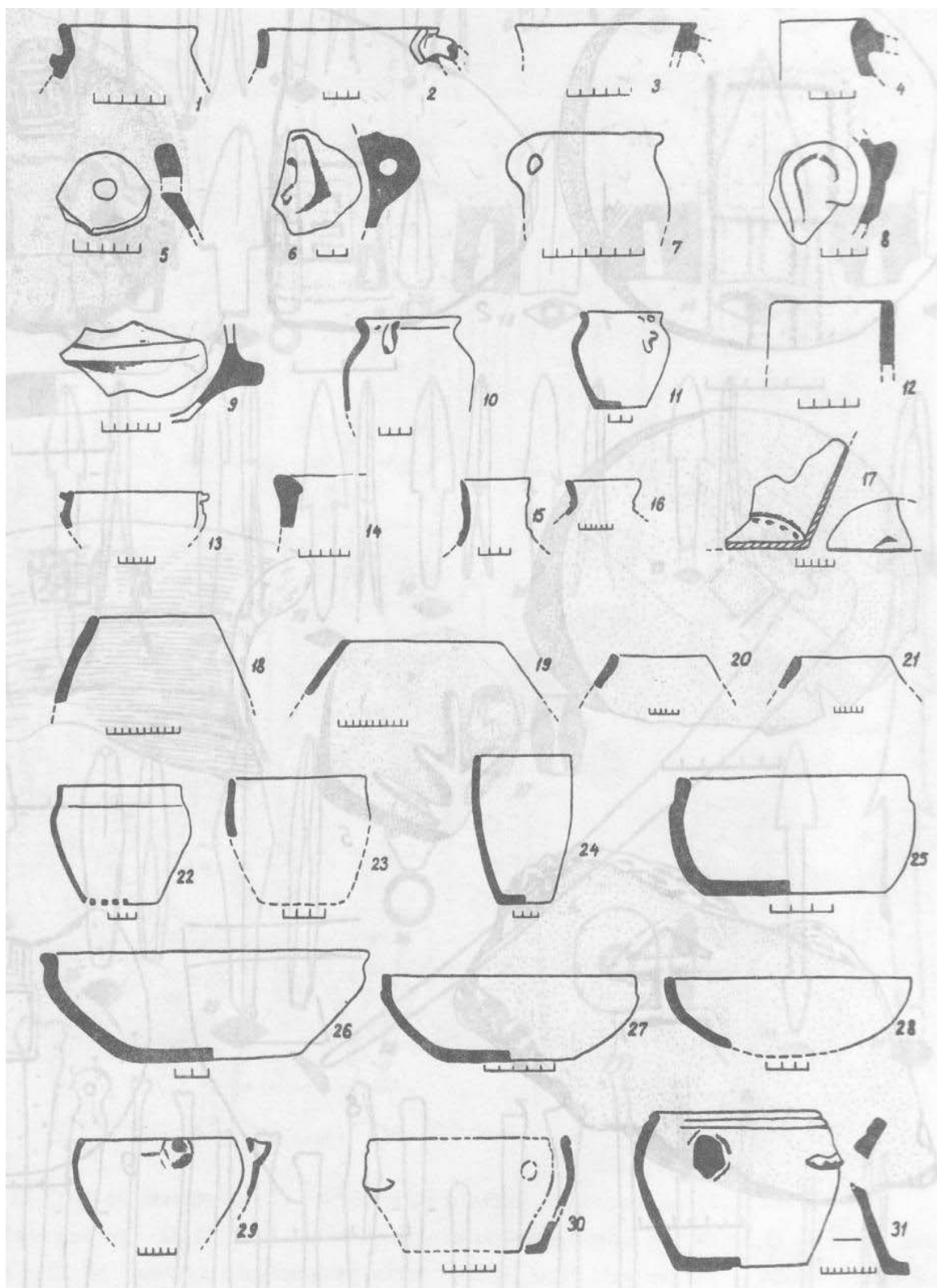


Fig.6.22b Ceramic cups, bowls and pitchers from Ivolaga (Davydova 1995: fig.178)

Intensive excavations at settlement sites (Pousaz et al. 2008; Danilov et al. 2008) as well as surface collections and test pit excavations on surveys (Wright et al. 2009; Houle 2009) have continued to build on the foundation of vessel assemblages and typologies in habitation contexts provided by the remains excavated at the Ivolga walled settlement in Buryatia (Davydova 1995). The collection of vessels at the Ivolga settlement consists of three main types of pots – (A) smaller wide-mouth pots, (B) larger narrow-necked broad-shouldered pots, and (C) open flat-rimmed pots [Fig.6.22a]⁸³. Wide-mouth pots constitute the noticeable majority of vessels, and most of them exhibit signs of burning linking them to the function of cooking.⁸⁴ Some have small lip handles added (A²), and others have holes in the bottom (A¹) perhaps for the processing of dairy foods (Davydova 1995) or possibly for the steaming of food.⁸⁵ The typical decoration around the neck is a simple band with a wavy line. The broad, open-mouthed flat-rimmed pots were likely used for serving, though they also have a variant with holes in the bottom (C¹) which could have been used for food processing or cooking. The wavy line decoration appears on most of these vessels as well. The narrow-neck pots on the whole are much larger than either of the previous two forms, reaching heights of over a

⁸³ Alphabetically-based indexes will be used to abbreviate the vessel typologies, adopting subscript roman numerals for stylistic differences and superscript arabic numerals for variations in form from the basic proto-type.

⁸⁴ A set of four pots found alongside a coffin in Central Mongolia included a wide-mouth pot with the remains of animals bones inside which would have had substantial portions of meat on them (National Museum of Korea 2003: 200) [Fig.6.24].

⁸⁵ Davydova (1995) adopts the notion that vessels with holes in the bottom were used for the processing of dairy products which require the straining of raw milks and creams. Ethnographic studies attest the wide use of leather and cloth sacks, rather than solely ceramics, hung on racks for the process of straining (Indra 2003), and it seems quite possible that such perishable items were the prominent form of vessels for these tasks in the Iron Age. The preponderance to assume dairy production with vessels of the Iron Age steppes overemphasizes the admittedly dominant, but not sole, pastoral portion of the subsistence economy. Such assumptions also tend to ignore the uses of vessels for the storage and cooking of agricultural products, as is further evidenced by the assumption of the storage of fermented beverages, rather than grains, for the larger narrow-neck pots (see below).

meter. Considering their large size and small openings, these were undoubtedly used for storage, and the hole near the bottom of many of them has lead archaeologists to conclude their use for dispensing liquids held within. Grains discovered in some of these pots in the large tombs at Noyon uul (Rudenko 1962) indicate a usage for the storage and controlled dispensing of agricultural products.⁸⁶ These pots occur in two stylistic variants – one with a long neck and round body (B_i), and one with a short neck, narrow bottom, and the characteristic wavy line around the neck and shoulder band of decoration (B_{ii}) which appears more often in the burials and habitation sites of the Iron Age steppes.

There were also a small number of dishes associated with serving and consuming found at the Ivolga settlement. Some variants of the wide-mouth pot have loop handles added (A³) and others with a spout (A⁴), both of which would have related to the serving of liquids. Some simple cup and bowls were also found, relating to the consumption of either food or beverages [Fig.6.22b]. A rare find was made of a stone oval cup with long ear-shaped handles, only found in one other instance at a complex settlement in the Minusinsk Basin further northwest of Tuva (Evtyukhova and Levashova 1946) [Fig.6.23]. This so-called ear-handle cup is a common vessel among lacquer and ceramic assemblages of Iron Age imperial China. A few fragments of bronze and iron cauldrons were also found, relating to the typical steppe form of footed, loop-handle cauldrons seen in numerous Bronze and Iron Age burials and art throughout Central Asia (e.g. Moshkova 1992) [Fig.6.24]. A category of vessel which appears especially within the

⁸⁶ A similar pot with a hole near the bottom was discovered in a large tomb at Tahiltin hotgor which had numerous additional pin-sized holes around the bottom and the shoulder (Miller et al. 2008). This would preclude the use of the pot for liquid storage, and perhaps relates to the ventilation of grains stored within. A wide-rimmed pot was found at Bogd uul (grave 20) in south central Mongolia with grains in it as well (Tseveendorj 1989a), opening up the possibility of storage use for this manner of pot. It seems, therefore, that the limited forms of pottery were being reused and adapted to serve a number of functions.

mortuary context is the vial. These miniature crock pots, which are often found in sets of five or six, are formed in the shape of either wide-mouth or narrow-neck pots, yet their size (less than 20cm) precludes them from serving the functions of cooking or storage. They may be rough imitations of the vessels used in life and made especially for the interment ceremony of the deceased.

Settlement surveys of seasonal campsites have recovered the same general assemblage of the three major types of pottery (A,B,C) as well as a small assortment of sherds from a few other types of ceramic vessels (Wright et al. 2009). In the case of burial contexts for the same broad period, we find a predominance of the wide-mouth pots and narrow-neck pots for cooking and storage, without as much of a presence of the flat-rimmed pots for serving [Fig.6.25]. Cauldrons, basin dishes, and plates are as rare as

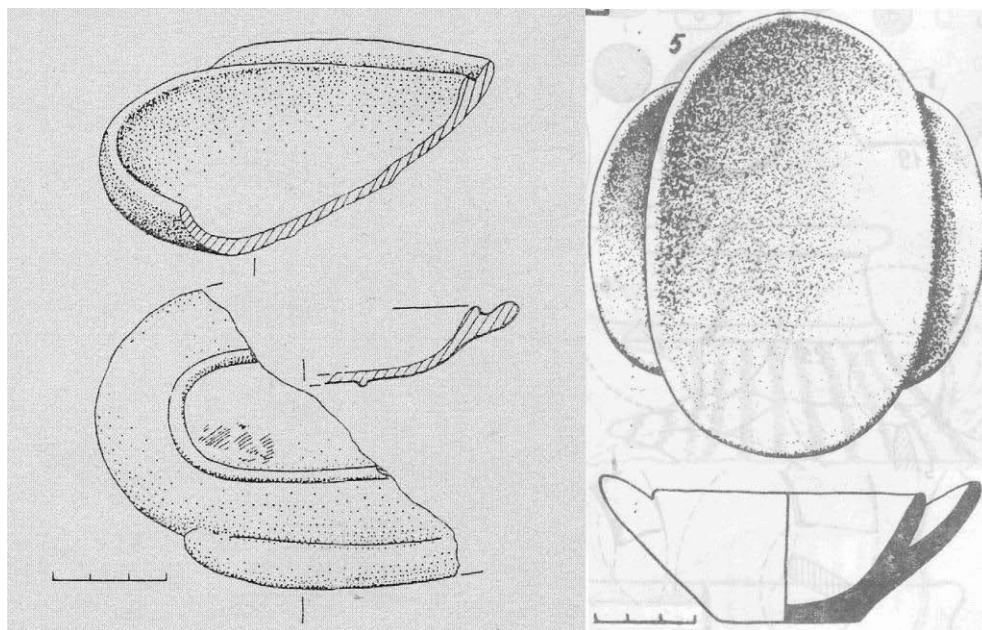


Fig.6.23 Stone oval cups from Minusinsk Basin and Ivolga (Evtyuhova and Levashova 1946: fig.29; Davydova 1995: fig.16)

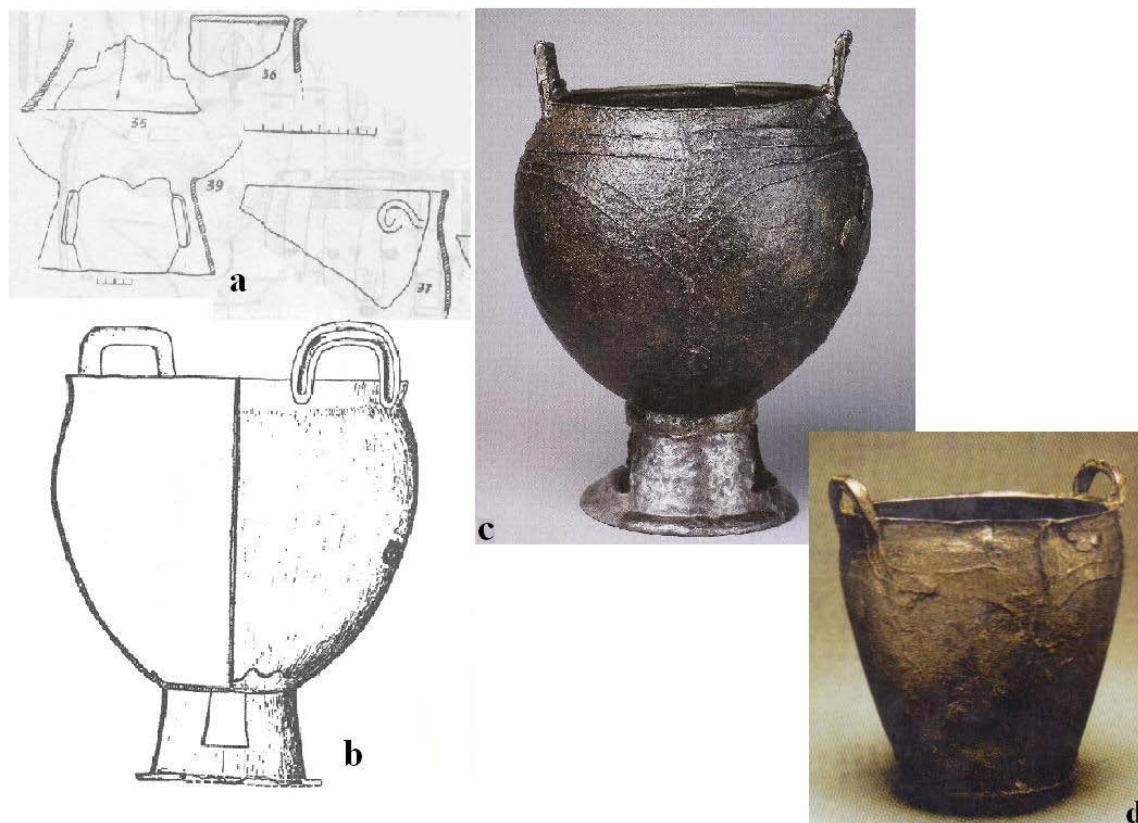


Fig.6.24 Bronze footed cauldron fragments, Ivolga (Davydova 1995: figs.186-187); Derestuy (Minyaev 1998: fig.21); Burhan tolgoi, Egiin gol (Torbat et al. 2003: 153); flat bottomed cauldron, Burhan tolgoi, Egiin gol (Torbat et al. 2003: 151)

they are in the habitation contexts. While it may seem that large feasting and serving paraphernalia are few in the mortuary context, the number of personal serving vessels (i.e. cups and bowls) comprises a segment of the burial assemblage proportionally larger than the habitation contexts. Ceramics, as they do in the living spaces, dominate the assemblages of vessels, and so the foreign lacquer cups stand out in the mortuary context on account of both their material and form [Fig.6.26]. The access, of the deceased or of those who inter them, to such foreign items through tribute, redistributive, or restricted trade networks conveys important indications of the access to or demonstration of socio-political power.



Fig.6.25 Ceramic wide-mouth and narrow-neck pots (National Museum of Korea 2003.pl.45-1)



Fig.6.26 Inscribed Chinese lacquer ear-cup, Noyon uul tomb 5 (Umehara1960.pl.lxi)

	Ceramic	Iron	Bronze	Wood	Lacquer	Birch-bark
Wide-mouth pot (A,A²)	156					
Narrow-neck pot (B)	121					14
Flat-rimmed pot (C)	6					
Steamer (C¹)	1					
Cauldron (D)	2	3	7			
Pitcher (A³,A⁴)	4					
Plate (E)				3	2	
Cup/bowl (F)	15			1	36	
Basin dish (G)			2	1		
Vial (H)	34					

Fig.6.27 Vessels in Burial Contexts (total count)

Personal Trappings

Many of the materials in the burials of Iron Age Eastern Inner Asia can be linked to a mobile pastoral way of life. The classic image of the mounted warrior indeed echoes in the predominance of equipment related to archery and horse riding, but we should be wary of limiting our view of the steppe populations to this one aspect of their society. The vast majority of weaponry, and indeed a significant portion of the overall burial assemblage, consists of bone bow reinforcement plates and arrowheads, mostly bone and iron [Fig.6.28]. The change from weaponry seen in the Bronze to Iron Age transition is significant not only in the shift from bronze to iron but also in the difference in form and function. Metal arrowheads became significantly larger and evolved into several different styles, and the bronze daggers widespread from Chandman (Novgorodova et al. 1982) to

North China (Wu En 2007) fade from their prominent place in the burial assemblages.⁸⁷

The iron arrowheads included small, triangular arrowheads, the more prevalent and distinctive trefoil arrowhead, and its variant, the tapered-point trefoil arrowhead. Chronological shifts can be seen in the metal arrowheads from bronze to iron, while bone arrowheads continue alongside these metal arrowheads. The difference between metal and bone is not chronological but one of function, perhaps related to the difference between hunting and warfare – the large heavy iron arrowheads meant more for flying greater distances and penetrating armor. The steppe archers likely possessed a volley of various arrows for a range of purposes [Fig.6.29].⁸⁸ Several iron swords, daggers, and spear heads have been found, but they are a very small proportion of the weaponry interred with the Iron Age deceased.

Though the bronze daggers diminished, simple iron knives persisted in the form of a single piece of iron with a ring handle at the end or an iron blade slotted into a wood handle. These relate less to weaponry than to a basic set of tools, including iron awls and small whetstones with holes drilled into one end. A predominate collection of the equipment found relates to horse riding. Numerous full and fragmentary sets of iron snaffle bits and cheek pieces (*psali*) have been found, and sometimes several sets with

⁸⁷ This change is a shift in the assortment of goods in mortuary contexts. It most likely reflects certain technological and strategic changes in weaponry and warfare, but the ritual aspect and social significance of the preceding decorative bronze knives – more aptly called daggers – must not be ignored. Heinrich Härke (1990) challenges the simple equation of weapon to warfare in the early Anglo-Saxon burials bearing decorated swords, documenting their presence in an era of post-conquest peace significant more for their connection to the conquering rulers than to the engagement in battle. The simpler, less decorated weaponry in the Iron Age steppe burials certainly retained less of a political connotation than the Bronze Age daggers, which seem to relate more to Härke's findings.

⁸⁸ The deceased from grave 13 at Shombuuziin belchir was buried with a socketed bone arrowhead, three standard trefoil iron arrowheads, and one tapered-point trefoil iron arrowhead.

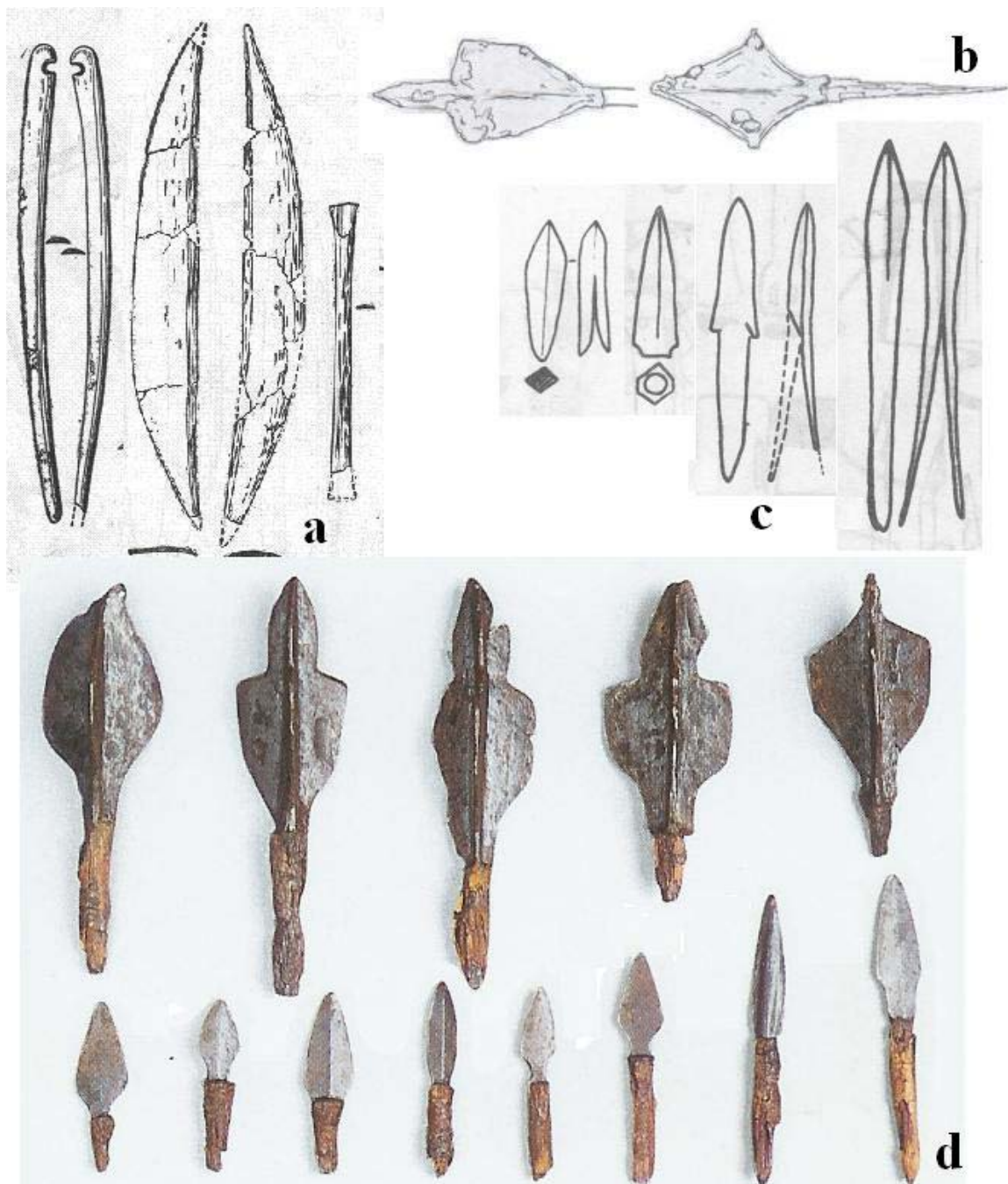


Fig.6.28 Bow and arrow equipment - (Konovalov 1976; Miller et al. 2006; Davydova 1995; Torbat et al. 2003)

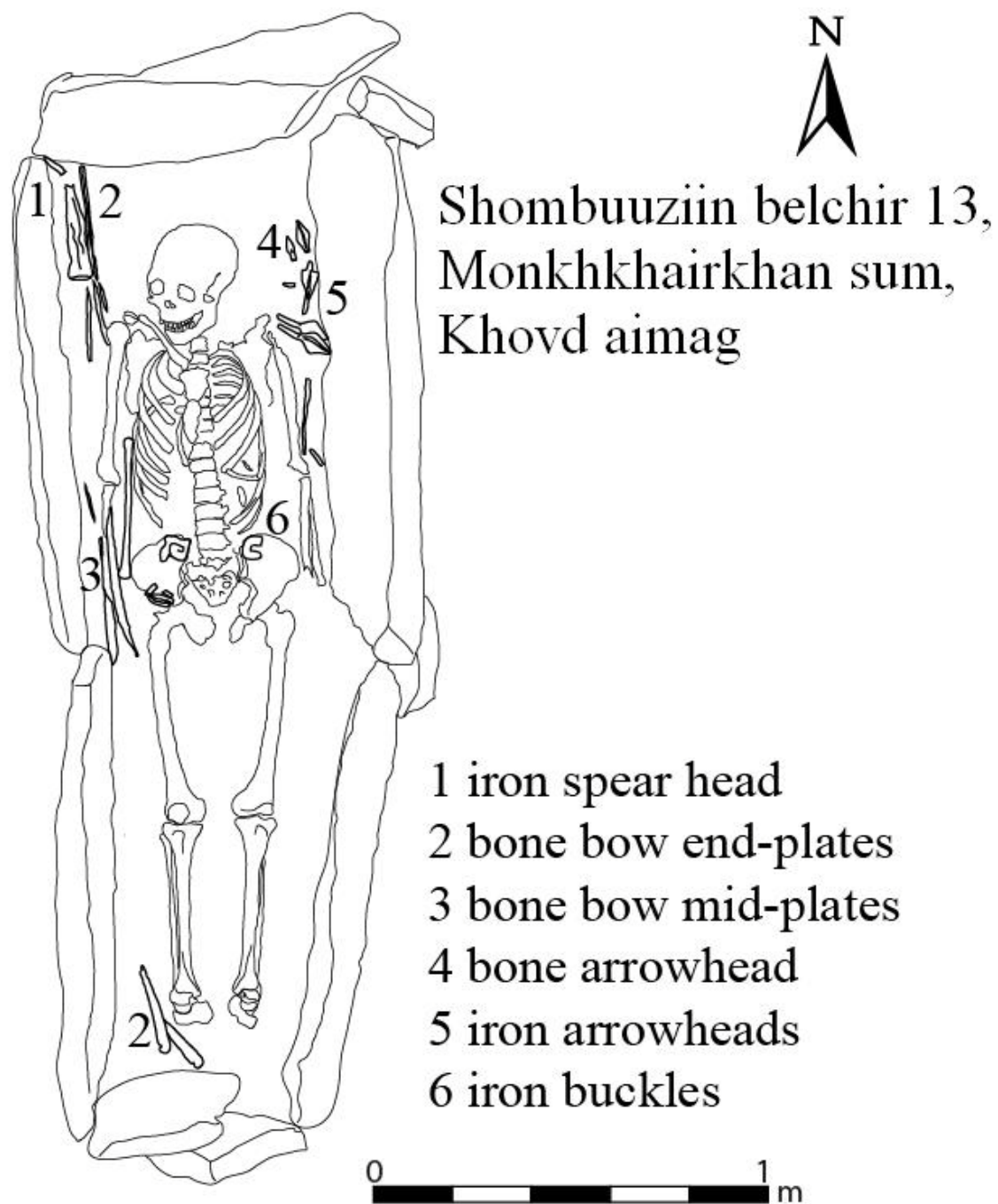


Fig.6.29 Grave 13 at Shombuuziin belchir, Khovd province (Miller et al. 2009)

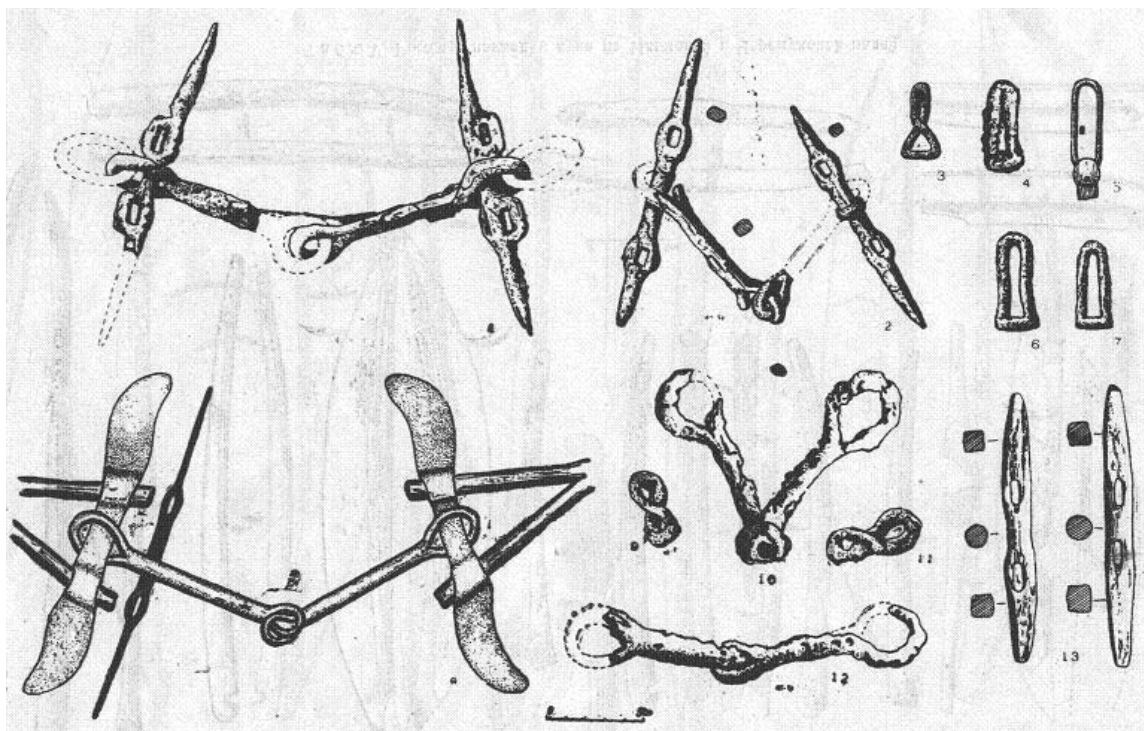


Fig.6.30 Iron horse bridelry (Konovalov 1976: pl.vi)

single interments [Fig.6.30]. Horse bridle equipment also included an array of iron buckles, rings, clasps, pins, fasteners, and small dangling ornaments, all of which have been found in the context of personal dressing. It seems a suite of fittings were produced and used for personal clothing as well as horse riding gear [Fig.6.31].

One form of personal trappings which has become confused in many of the Russian and Mongolian excavation reports deserves a proper division: the smooth “bone sticks.”⁸⁹ Of the items called bone sticks, there are two different forms – long and short sticks with knobbed or slightly spooned ends and thin long sticks with rounded tips. These variations in form most likely reflect a difference in function, and their exact

⁸⁹ These sticks are called generally *savh* in the Mongolian reports, a word which literally means “bone stick” but connotes “chopstick” in modern Mongolian.

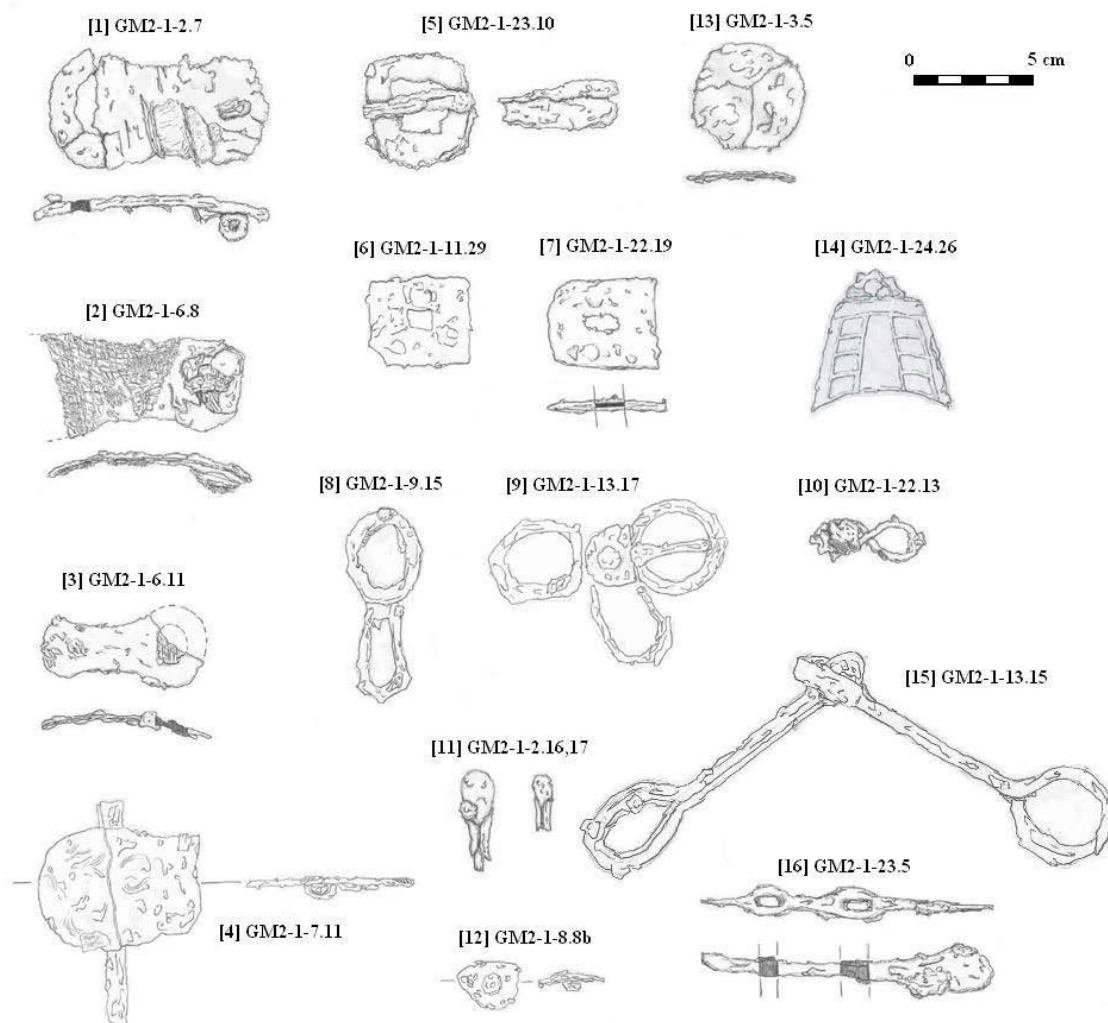


Fig.6.31 Iron artifacts, Gol Mod 2, Arkhangai (Miller et al. 2006: fig.8)

provenience in undisturbed graves also suggests a difference. The shorter sticks and those with spooned ends are often found next to the skulls, and were probably hairpins [Fig.6.32b]. The long singular sticks may have been a toiletry tool of some kind [Fig.6.32c], similar to the pipe-shaped bone spoons found in some of these burials [Fig.6.32f]. Many of the long thin sticks were found in pairs within the antechambers along with storage or service vessels such as the lacquered cups and bowls [Fig.6.32a].

These were probably chopsticks for food consumption, and their concurrent appearance with Chinese cups and bowls may relate to the employment of Chinese implements for feasting. The presence of the chopsticks next to standard cuts of livestock meat (Miller et al. 2008) and lacquer bowls alongside Inner Asian style cauldrons with livestock meats (Khantanbaatar 2007) show that the inclusion of foreign accoutrements in the steppe feasts may have altered the fashion of dining but it did not appear to greatly alter the menu, *per se*.

Personal ornamentation can be divided into three major categories: (a) various bone and metal fasteners and hangings; (b) beads, as necklaces, pendants, bracelets, and belt embellishment; and (c) belt plates, plaques and rings. Beads made from glass, agate, amber, ceramic, shell, bone and stone pervade the assemblage of dressings. Other small ornaments vary broadly in size, shape and material, including pressed-foil and open-work precious metal badges and hanging ornaments. These adorned the head, neck, arms, torso, and, most significantly, the waist of the deceased [Fig.6.33].⁹⁰ A large number of the belt trimmings included cowry shells and imitations of them out of ceramic or shell. Some of the materials such as cowry shells and amber may have come from greater distances and thus had added value to them for the expression of wealth.

Ankle bones (astragali) of large and small livestock have been found in settlement as well as burial contexts [Fig.6.34]. Their documented use in prognostication games during the medieval to modern times in Mongolia, their frequent placement at the waist of the deceased, and the bearing of engraved symbols on some of these polished bone

⁹⁰ Two Chinese bronze coins were found adorning the belt of this individual. A smattering of other burials in the steppes have been found with Chinese coins, as have some settlements, and this aids in the relative dating of sites – an issue to be discussed below.

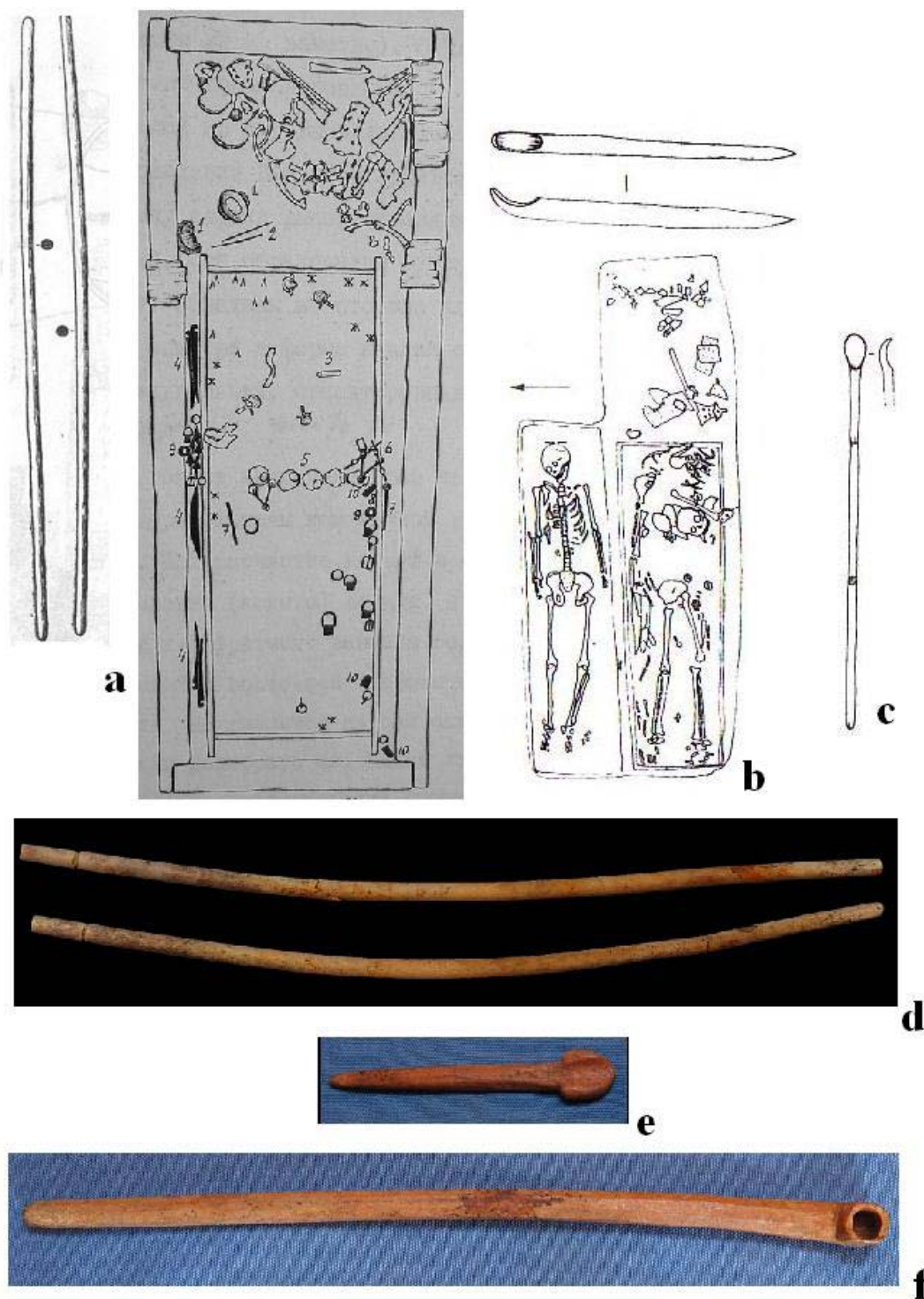


Fig.6.32 bone sticks: (a) Il'movaya pad'50(Konovalov 1976: fig.20); (b) Burhan tolgoi 33 (Torbat et al.2003: 203). (c) Burhan tolgoi 38 (Torbat et al.2003: 209); (d) Tahiltin hotgor 64, 82-2, 25-2 (Miller et al.2008)

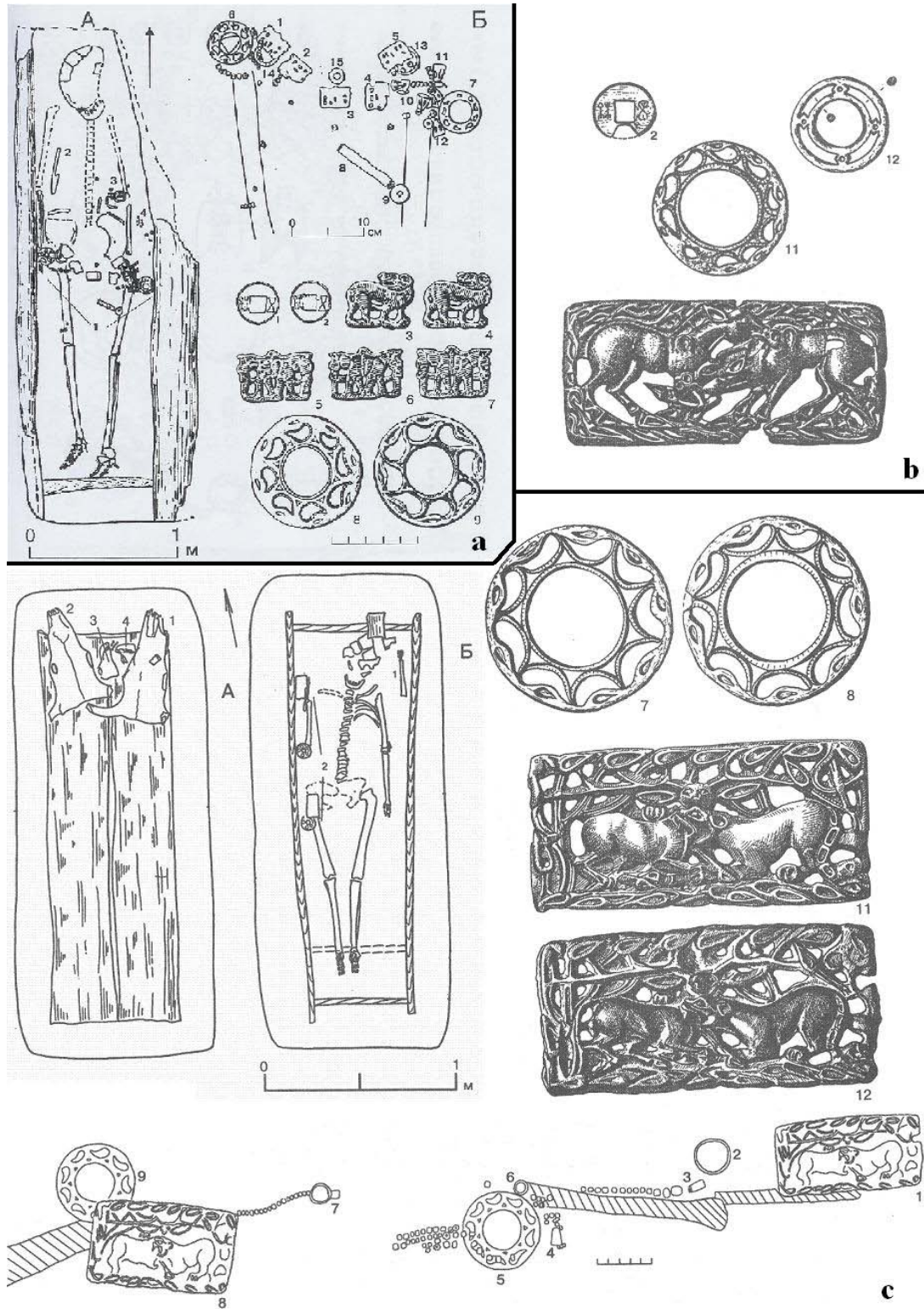


Fig.6.33 Derestuy graves and ornaments: (a) DRS-38; (b) DRS-102; (c) DRS-108 (Minyaev 1998: figs.6; 84; 90-91)

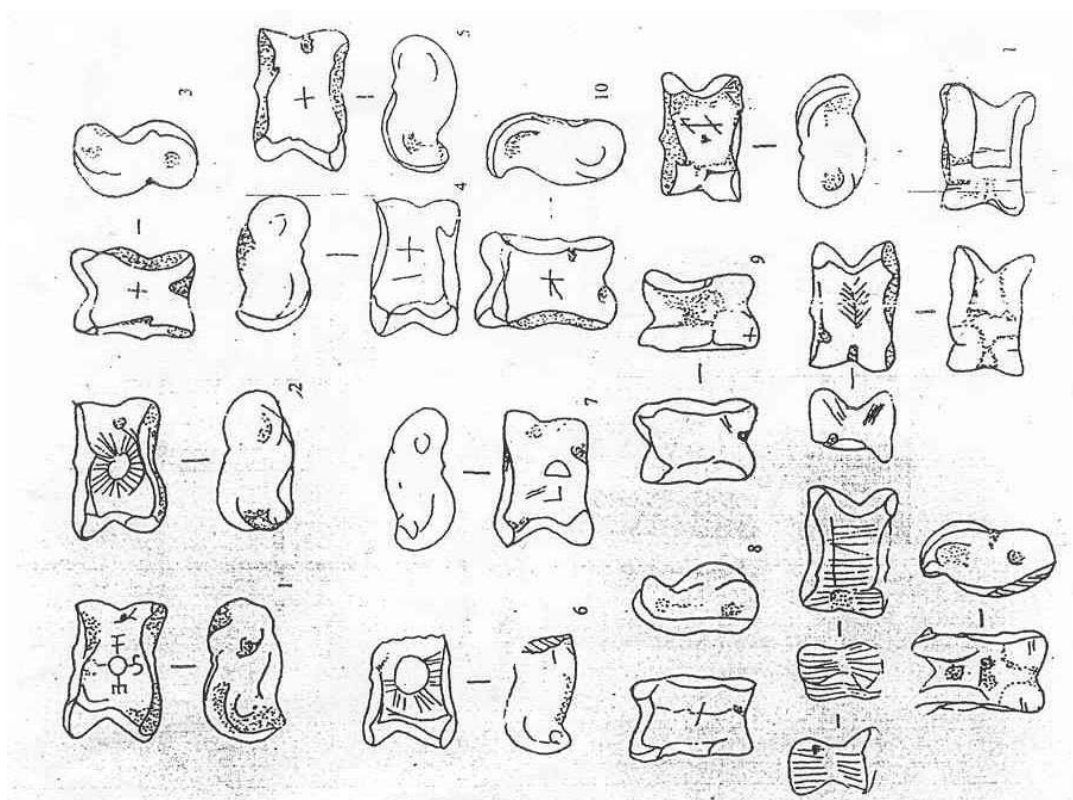


Fig.6.34 Marked astragali from grave GM2-1-3, Gol Mod 2 (Erdeneebaater et al. 2002)

pieces all marks them as important artifacts for studying the Iron Age steppe peoples (Davaatseren 2006). A few of the marks on these astragali have been matched to the markings found on the bottoms of some of the pots (Miller et al. 2006).

Much art historical and archaeological attention has been given to the large and often intricate belt plaques of the steppe people (So and Bunker 1995) – open-work, inlaid, gilding and other craftsmanship utilizing gold, silver, bronze and precious stones – but I will merely touch upon them as one category of prominent belt ornamentation [Fig.6.35]. Another manner of belt adornment includes stone plates with geometric designs [Fig.6.36]. These plates do not overlap in use with the more ornate plaques, and, as they are approximately the same size, may serve the same central function as the



Fig.6.35 (a) Derestuy (Minyaev 1998); (b) Derestuy (Minyaev 1998); (c) Ivolga (Davydova 1996); (d) Shombuuziin belchir (Miller et al. 2009); (e) Durlig Nars (National Museum of Korea 2008); (f) Burhan tolgoi (Torbat et al. 2003); (g) Xiwengou Zhai Collection (So and Bunker 1995) equivalent to Keshengzhuang plaques

ostentatious plaques. Fragments of the geometric plates have also been found in settlement contexts (Davydova 1995; Pousaz et al. 2008). The third category of prominent belt ornamentation derives perhaps more directly from the function of securing the waist garments. Belts fastened with large iron rings could be augmented by flat stone rings or open-work bronze rings [Fig.6.33]. The above elements can be found integrated

in a variety of ornamentation schemes – stone flat rings and talon-shaped pendants flank a pair of bronze open-work plaques with animal combat scenes [Fig.6.35c] in a small grave nearby the Ivolga settlement. Whether these plaques and other belt ornaments were totemistic or merely general emblems with a steppe vocabulary, they undoubtedly were the central pieces of the principal canvas for displaying personal social status. Following this line of reasoning, settlement [Fig.6.37] – and regional and social distinctions could perhaps be observed in some of the differences of objects and their combinations.⁹¹ We may look beyond contentions equating them to ethnic markers and pursue analyses that emphasize their relations to differences in wealth. Some were of greater craftsmanship or incorporated more precious metals while others were simple iron or stone clasps. These personal adornments qualified as objects which displayed social status. In this study, I wish to develop discussions of those objects which not only displayed but also demonstrated social and political power through their use in rituals and ritualized interactions.

Lastly, in the category of mirrors, there are three general types, the first two of which may be considered together as being distinctively Central Asian [Fig.6.38a,b]. A round bronze mirror with a single hole at the top, and decorated with two simple ring patterns, found at Gol Mod 2 cemetery in central Mongolia (Miller et al. 2006) bears a striking resemblance to round flat mirrors with three top holes found within Iron Age graves to the west in Xinjiang [Fig.6.39a,b] and in the Bronze Age tombs of Chandman

⁹¹ A recent statistical analysis utilized the plethora of data in the southern regions of Lake Baikal to determine possible social distinctions and hierarchies (Kradin et al. 2004), but a study of regional rather than social differences, using Baikal as compared with other areas, though daunting, could be attempted.

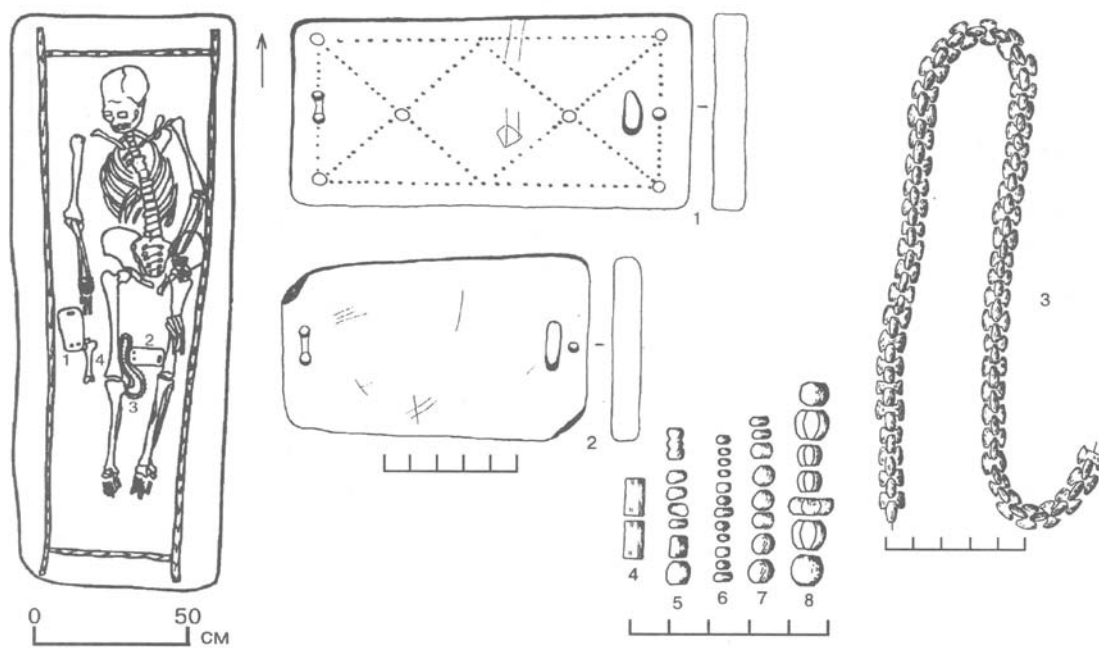


Fig.6.36 Derestuy 52 (Minyaev 1998.Fig.66)

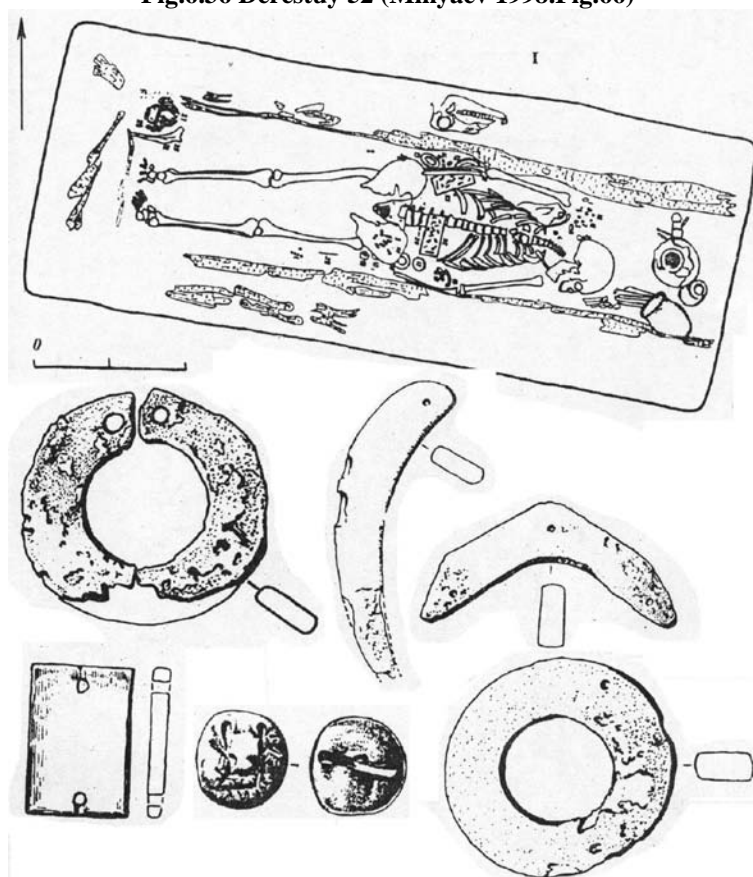


Fig.6.37 Ivolga 100 (Davydova 1996.fig.28-31)

further north [Fig.6.11a]. A different kind of round mirror, found also at Gol Mod 2, has a single hole at one end, a small triangular protrusion at the other end, and a thick ridge. This mirror, and another exactly like it found at Delgerhaan uul in central Mongolia [Fig.6.38b], bears a resemblance to numerous bronze mirrors across Central Asia with either long or shortened triangular handles, an example of which was found in grave 2 at Pazyryk [Fig.6.39c].

The third type of mirror is Chinese, and, by the example yet again of Pazyryk (Rudenko 1970: 115), fragments of these mirrors had already begun appearing in graves of the steppes by the advent of the Iron Age in East Inner Asia and their presence seems to increase over time [Fig.6.38c,d]. Chinese bronze mirrors in graves of the Mongolian steppes are most often found broken or partial, and ample evidence indicates this not to be the result of looting but of intentional destruction (Minyaev and Sakharovskaya 2007a). However, the handful of Central Asian style mirrors have been found whole, wrapped in multi-layered textile bags with other ornaments and trinkets (Miller et al. 2006). Their occasion in burials is an indication of their presence amongst the Xiongnu, but their paucity in graves and apparent differential treatment contrasts starkly with the numerous broken Chinese mirrors in mortuary contexts. Since the vast majority of mirrors found in Han tombs are whole, this might imply a difference in treatment of mirrors, at least in mortuary contexts and rituals of the steppe people. Regardless of the possible intentions of the destruction of the Chinese mirrors, it is the differential treatment I wish to highlight between domestic and foreign items of seemingly the same function.



Fig.6.38 Bronze mirrors (Miller et al. 2006; Minyaev 2007; The Collections of the National University of Mongolia; Miller et al. 2006)

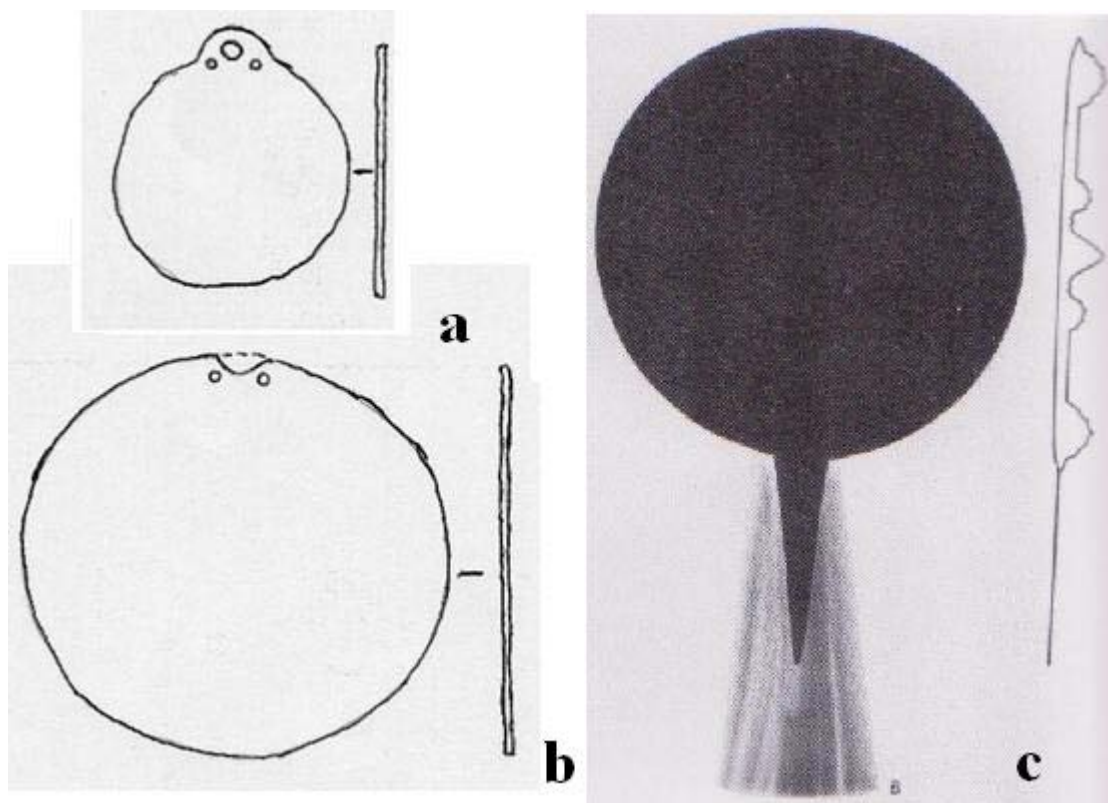


Fig.6.39 Bronze mirrors from Xinjiang and South Siberia (Xinjiang shehui 1982; Xinjiang and Tulufan 1994; Rudenko 1970)

Circular Graves

The predominant burial style across the Mongolian steppes and south of Lake Baikal in the late first millennium BC was that marked by a thick ring of stones easily visible on the ground surface [Fig.6.40]. They have accordingly been called circular graves. These are in contrast to the square mounded tombs discussed below, but include the circular graves which flanked the larger tombs. The circular demarcations were constructed overtop burial shaft pits, the majority of which were oriented more or less north (Torbat 2004), and the body is almost always laid in a stretched supine position. Several burial grounds, like that of the Ivolga cemetery, have no markings above surface or, like Derestuy, have only surface markings for the larger of the graves. This calls into

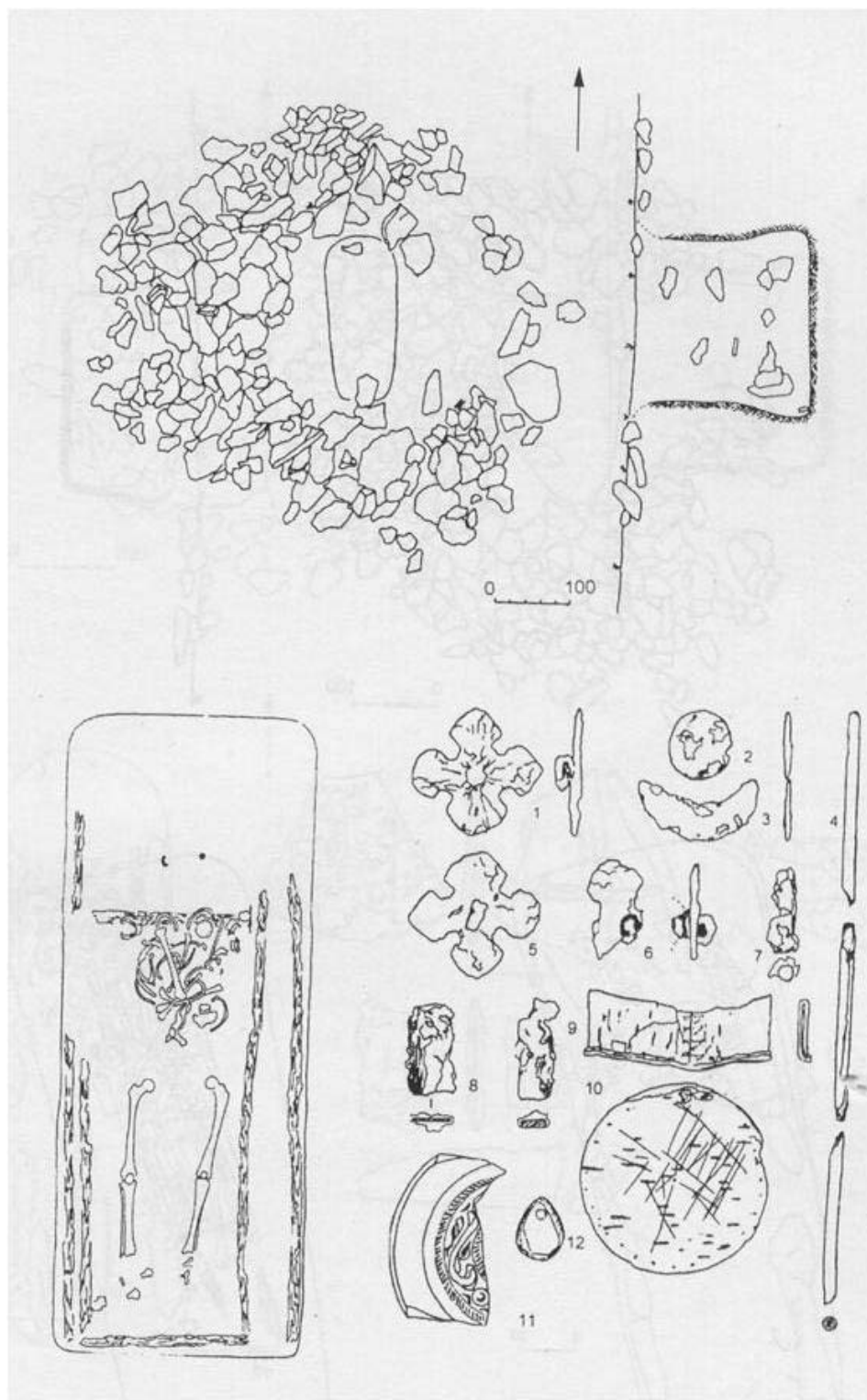


Fig.6.40 Grave 1, Burkhan tolgoi, Egiin gol (Torbat et al. 2003.fig.173)

question the issue of sampling. In both these cases, a deliberate clearing was made of the soil to look for unmarked graves, yet this strategy was precipitated by their proximity to larger marked graves or the visible walls of a settlement. Since the size and contents of the unmarked graves at Ivolga, and some at Derestuy, are on the whole less than those which are marked, we may assume that an entire portion of the society is underrepresented in the survey of steppe burials for this time period and the broader area of Eastern Inner Asia.⁹²

The median size of the stone ring markers seems to cluster around three to four meters with an average of five meters and trailing off into one possible secondary mode around ten to twelve meters [Fig.6.41]. Some of the graves documented have surface markings so badly disturbed that the stone scatter does not allow for accurate measurement of the original size. Recent excavations at Tahiltin hotgor cemetery in the Mongolian Altai [see Fig.6.52] have revealed a distinct group of burials which are marked on the surface by a small cluster of stones rather than a ring and have demonstrated that stones on the surface which appear to be a ring in some cases may actually be a different form of surface demarcation which is now distorted (Miller et al. 2008). The presence of these stone cluster marked burials has continued to be documented alongside standard circular burials at the site of Shombuuziin belchir in the Altai (Miller et al. 2009). For the larger stone demarcations, the problem of disturbance

⁹² Some Mongolian archaeologists (Batsaikhan 2003; Torbat 2004) have proposed a division between large square mounded tombs (to be discussed below) and circular graves equal to a division between the élite and the commoners. I would argue that rather than representing the commoners, or “common people,” the circular graves are the common, or standard, type of Xiongnu burial which archaeologists have found in this eastern region of Inner Asia. This is a critical semantic distinction to recognize if we are to engage in the reconstruction of social dynamics based on the burial data. The overwhelming majority of mortuary material we presently have at our disposal thus represents gradations of members of the society who held significant status – a spectrum of so-called “élites.”

does not affect the ability to measure its approximate size or determine its original form. Whether a ring of stones surrounding the burial pit or a small pile overtop of it, these surface stones are significant in that they mark the landscape and remain a visible testament to the deceased beneath.

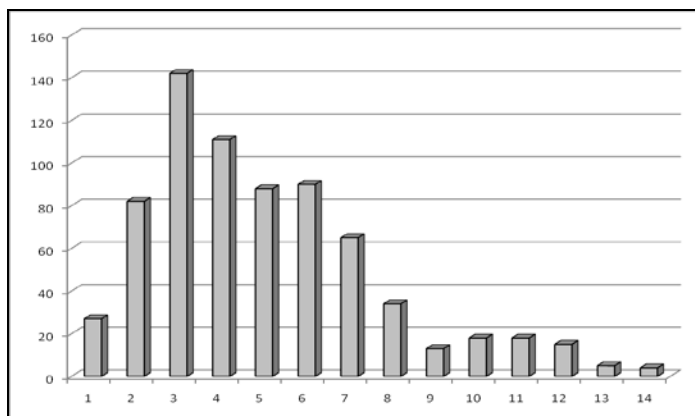


Fig.6.41 Size of stone ring grave markers (m) [n=713, Mean=5.73m, SD=2.66]

The depth of these graves is definitively greater than the slab graves or stone kurgans that precede them, with shallow pits beneath their surface markings. The range of grave depths, nevertheless, seems relatively small [Fig.6.42a], and grave depth does not correlate strongly with the size of the surface marking [Fig.6.42b]. Focused studies of this relationship on an individual site basis (Miller et al. 2006; Yeruul-Erdene 2004) have also seen no correlation, even in single tomb complexes. Valiant and painstaking efforts in this study and others (c.f. Torbat 2004) have been made to catalogue the length and width of burial pits. Yet, the difference in labor required within this spectrum of small burial pits does not constitute a factor statistically significant enough to warrant a further comparative study of their sizes. The substantial difference in burial pit size between the circular graves and the larger square mounded tombs, however, deserves discussion.

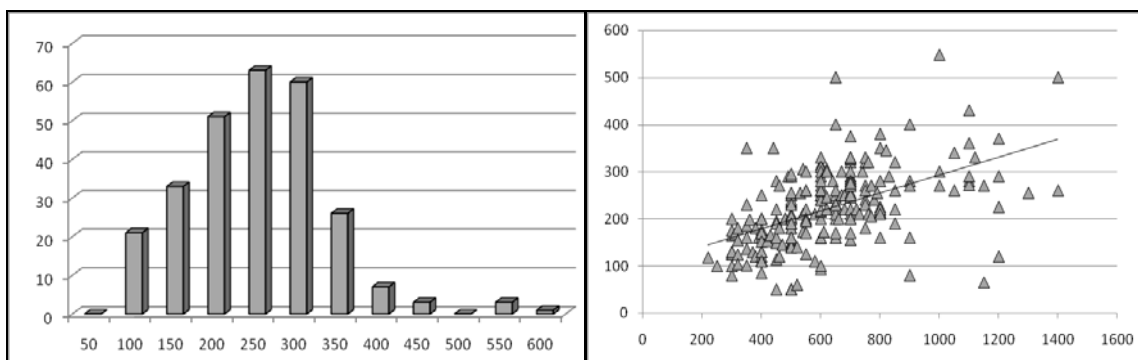
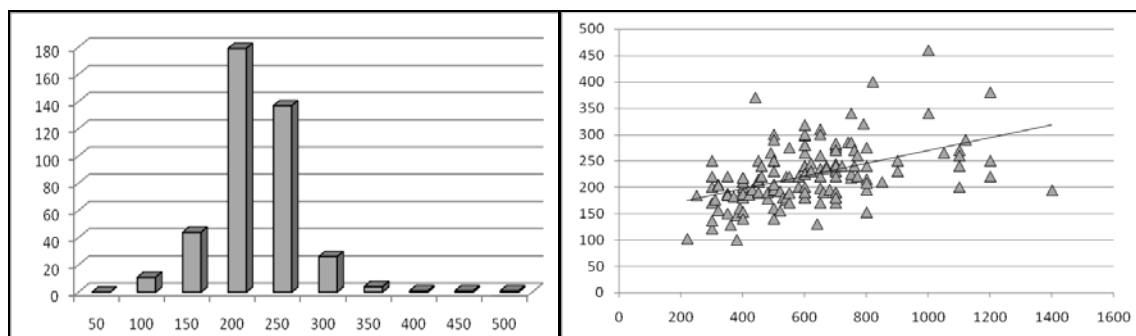


Fig.6.42 (a) Grave depth (cm) [n=268, Mean=216cm]
(b) Grave surface marker size versus grave depth (cm) [n=236, $r^2=0.2663$]

The spectrum of investment in grave furnishing merits detailed investigation as well since it incorporates the differences in material used (some more limited or valuable than others), the size and number or layers of furnishing deposited (and hence a return to the issue of material), and the difference in craftsmanship and decoration. The size of the burial chamber – and by this I mean the greatest extent of the furnishing which contained the deceased, as opposed to the burial *pit* – clusters tightly around 150 to 250 cm, most often not too much greater than the size of the body which the furnishing contains [Fig.6.43a]. There is likewise no strong correlation between the size of the stone rings and the size of the burial chamber furnishing [Fig.6.43b]. Though each of the above variables show a slight increase, the size of the surface demarcation among the circular graves does not appear to be a determinant of the grave depth or chamber size. We should keep in mind that the grave pit and chamber were features viewed during the construction and the interment ceremony, and only the surface marker could be viewed afterward. The surface marker thus remained a continual variable of location (in the landscape and the burial ground) and size (as compared to other graves before and after).



**Fig.6.43 (a) Chamber length (cm) [n=405, Mean=192cm]
(b) Grave surface marker size versus chamber length (cm) [n=148, $r^2=0.2218$]**

Grave furnishing material consists of stone and wood and variant combinations of these [Fig.6.44].⁹³ Whereas in the preceding slab grave burial tradition, stone cists (S) were the prevalent form, in the Iron Age they represent an unquestionable minority of grave furnishing. Some archaeologists (e.g. Erdenebaatar 2000) have claimed the stone cists were reserved for the interment of children, but a review of the full data of Iron Age burials shows that half of them contained adults. The overwhelming majority of furnished graves (47%) contain single wooden coffins (W). The rarer combinations include wood coffins within a stone outer chamber (SW), a wooden coffin within an outer wooden chamber (WW), and the larger graves with a double coffin nested within a stone outer chamber (SWW). The total of each of these three combinations is more or less equal when compared with the number of single coffins, but in these we find proportionally more decorated coffins.

The wooden chambers are usually constructed from hewn logs with interlocking ends. Coffins are almost always made from wood planks and usually have the head and

⁹³ Numerous cases of birch-bark coffins occur in the farthest northern reaches of Inner Mongolia (Wei 2004), but these appear limited to this area. The use of birch-bark elsewhere in the steppes of Eastern Inner Asia discussed here does not apply to coffin construction.

foot walls set slightly inward so that the side walls protrude [Fig.6.45b]. Many burials have also yielded small iron nails set into the points where these coffin walls join. Most coffins excavated have been poorly preserved – leaving only smears or fragments of the original wood – so we must rely on those sites whose wood furnishings are well preserved to study the subtleties of craftsmanship. The use of butterfly tenons in coffin construction is not so common in comparison to either the use of nails or more simple and limited tenons, but occurs enough to attract attention [Fig.6.45d]. These tenons join the longer planks and are supplemented by smaller rectangular tenons joining the corners and edges [Fig.6.45a,c].

Coffin decoration consisted of a lattice pattern on the exterior of the coffin and four-leafed (quatrefoil) emblems in the spaces between the latticework lines. The material used for this decoration included wood, birch-bark, iron (the most prevalent) [Fig.6.40], bronze, gold, and at times a combination of these [Fig.6.46]. Traces of textile have also been found beneath the pieces of ornamentation, indicating the coffins were often wrapped first in cloth and the decorative elements then mounted on the coffin overtop the cloth. One instance of a painted coffin was found recently at the small cemetery of Shombuuziin belchir, but even here the painting was imitating the lattice-work pattern, placing an undercoat of red over the coffin walls exterior and then brushing the lattice pattern in black and white overtop (Miller et al. 2009).

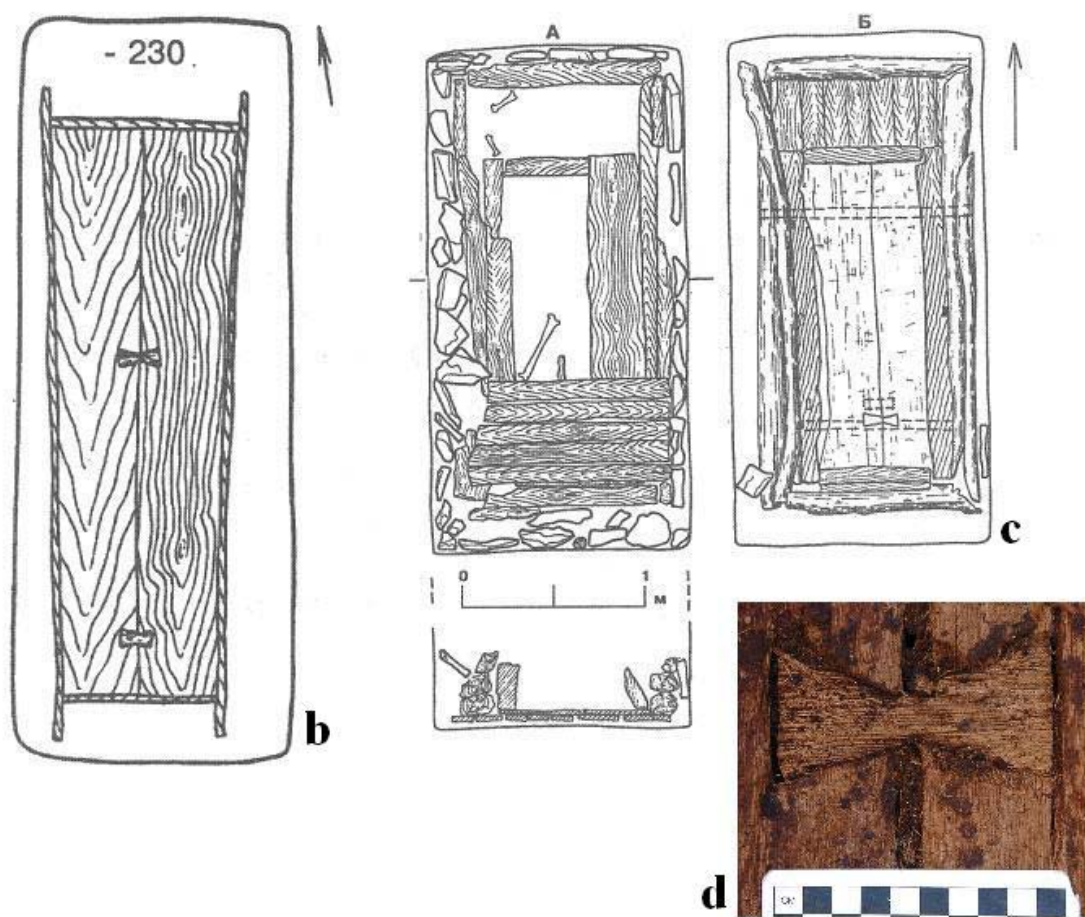
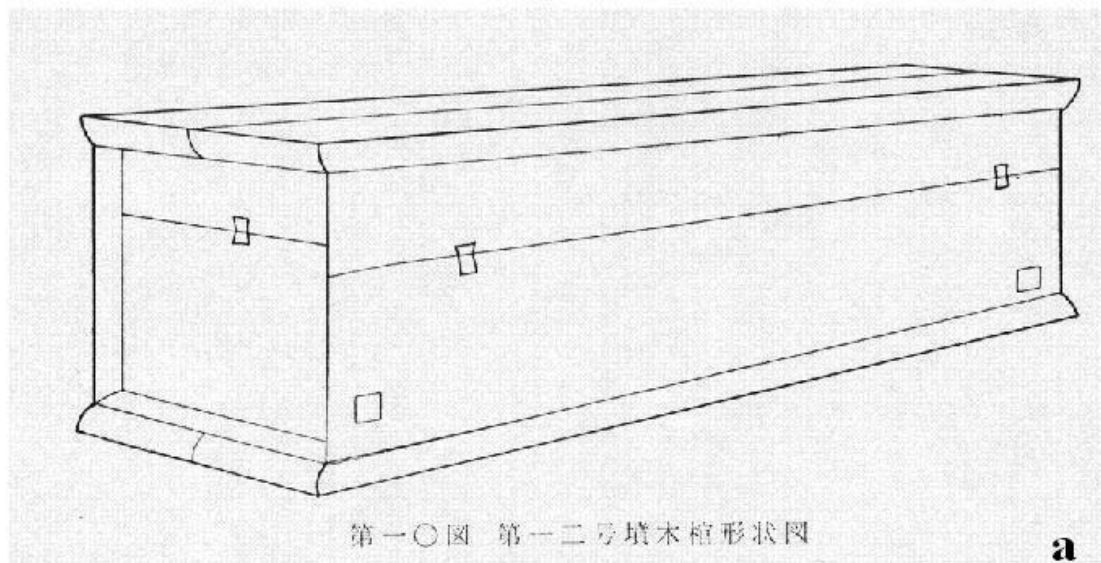


Fig.6.45 Wood coffins: (a) tomb 12, Noyon uul (Umehara 1960: fig.10); (b,c) graves 71 and 77, Derestuy (Minyaev 1998: figs.54,58); (d) tomb 64, Tahiltin hotgor (Miller et al. 2008)

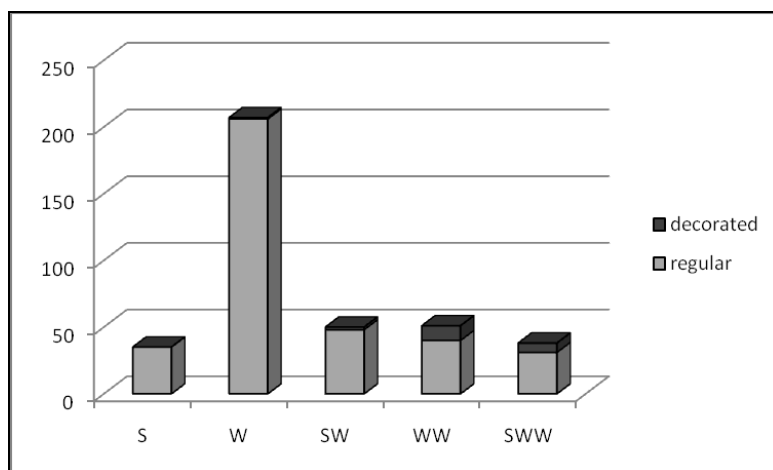


Fig.6.44 Grave Furnishing Types (total counts)
S: Stone, W: Wood (in order of outer to innermost containment)

Another element of decoration that occurs is the mounting of a circle and crescent at the head of the coffin. These emblems are most often made of iron, with the occasional gold foil mounting [Fig.6.47]. Many of the circles and crescents have been found strewn out of their original positions due to looting, yet the bindings on the backs of many iron pieces and the pin holes with iron rust in the few gold versions evidence their probable previous mountings on wood. A few instances of intact graves show these pieces all to have been at the heads of the coffins [Fig.6.40], though many of the remaining scattered iron circles and crescents may have been attached to personal garments. For this reason,

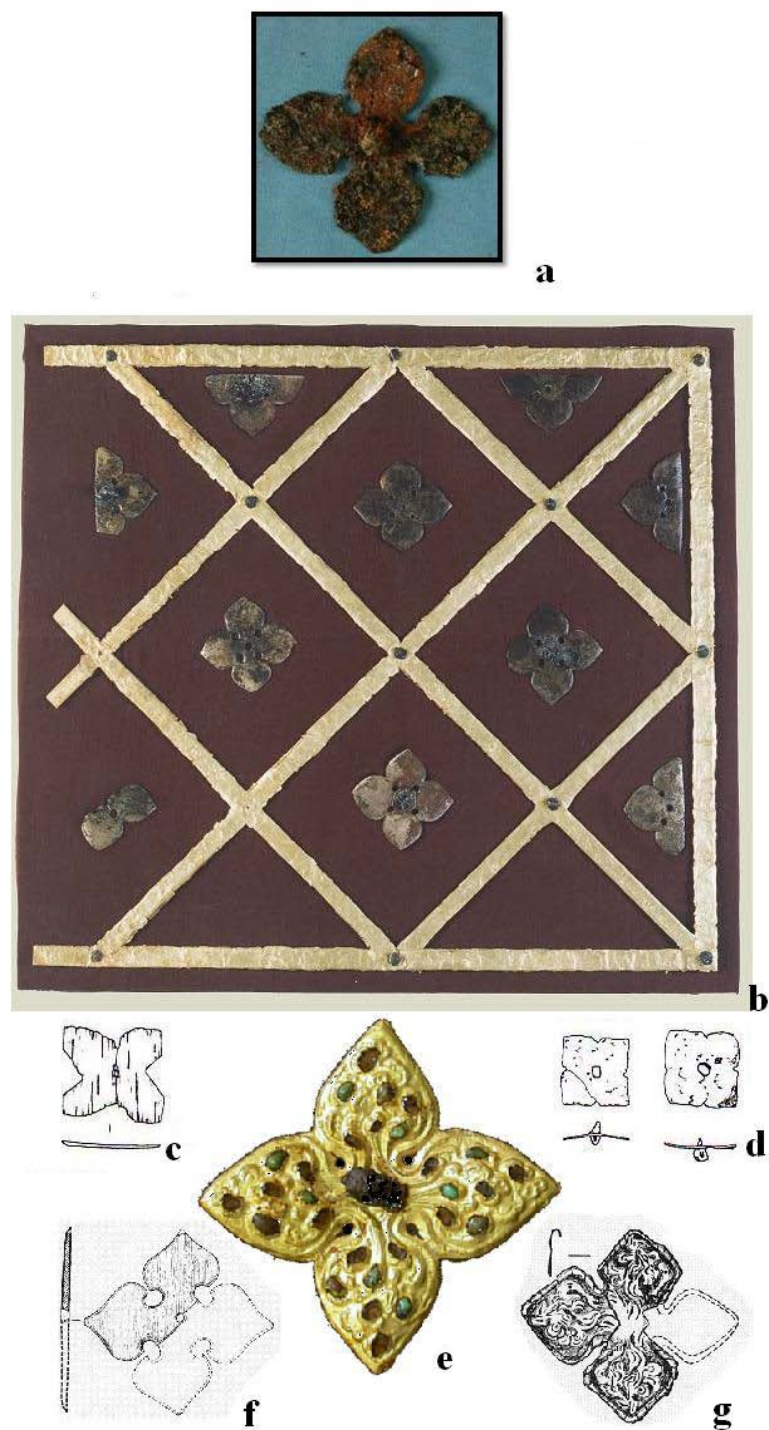


Fig.6.46 Latticework and quadrefoil coffin decoration: (a) iron, Tahiltin-hotgor; (b) gold and bronze, Il'movaya pad' (Konovalov 2008: Fig.76); (c) birch-bark, Burhan tolgoi (Torbat et al.2003: 239); (d) iron, Burhan tolgoi (Torbat et al.2003: 197) (e) goldfoil over iron with inlays (Mission 2007: 81); (f) wood, Noyon uul (Umehara 1960: 46); (g) gold foil over iron, Noyon uul (Umehara 1960: 46)



Fig.6.47 circle and crescent (“sun and moon”) (a) gold mounts, Tahiltin-hotgor tomb 64 (Miller et al.2008: Fig.7); (b) iron mounts, Burhan tolgoi (Torbat et al.2003: 151)

while we may speak of their incorporation into coffin ornamentation, we cannot assume that all such adornments were part of the furnishing décor. The matter which shall be more fully investigated in the following chapter is the nevertheless surprising degree to which coffin decoration in burials of the Mongolian steppes adhered to a standard form.

In addition to the archery and horse-riding equipment, the placement of animal offerings is one of the features which archaeologists have repeatedly cited in their depictions of the quintessential mounted nomadic pastoralists of the steppes.⁹⁴ Hanks

⁹⁴ The recent emphasis in studies of so-called nomads, as discussed in chapter three, reminds us in our analyses to conceptually separate the issue of mobile habitation patterns from that of a pastoral economic basis (Boyle, Renfrew and Levine 2002; Frachetti 2004). We should accordingly associate the presence of animal offerings with a pastoral portion of the subsistence economy and not necessarily with a package presentation of the classic nomad.

(2002: 185) warns against the quantitative interpretation of herd compositions from the mortuary contexts of steppe societies and instead directs us toward the ritual significance of their presence in the graves and their reflection of a community's involvement in the interment ceremonies. Most of the burials in the steppes include animal remains in one form or another. Of the two hundred graves surveyed which contained animal offerings, approximately half contained the remains of one animal, while the other half contained several numbers of animals.⁹⁵

Aside from the occasional deer, bird or rabbit bones, and the predominance of fish at the sites of Derestuy and Ivolga near Lake Baikal, the animals interred consisted almost exclusively of domestic animals. Two thirds of the offering assemblages included the remains of sheep/goat, horse and cattle were each present in about forty percent of the sacrificial deposits, and a dozen of the graves contained the interment of a dog. While these dogs were most often placed whole in with the deceased, the livestock and horses had particular portions offered into the grave – their heads or mandibles, hooves and lower leg bones, ribs, vertebrae, and sacrae [Fig.6.48]. This selection of portions for the grave differs from customs such as the placement of entire horses in the preceding Pazyryk style graves [Figs.6.14,16] and likely relates to the disposal of the rest of the animal in some manner or stage of ritual – likely feasting – which has left no direct evidence within the graves.

⁹⁵ The mean number of animals interred is 2.64, including the handful of burials with more than seven and the far outliers of nineteen, twenty-seven, and thirty-six animals in one grave. Beyond an issue of heightened status of the deceased, such outliers in grave offerings can implicate the competition for association with the deceased of expression of wealth which may have occurred between the living in the process of performing and participating in mortuary rituals (Flad 2002).

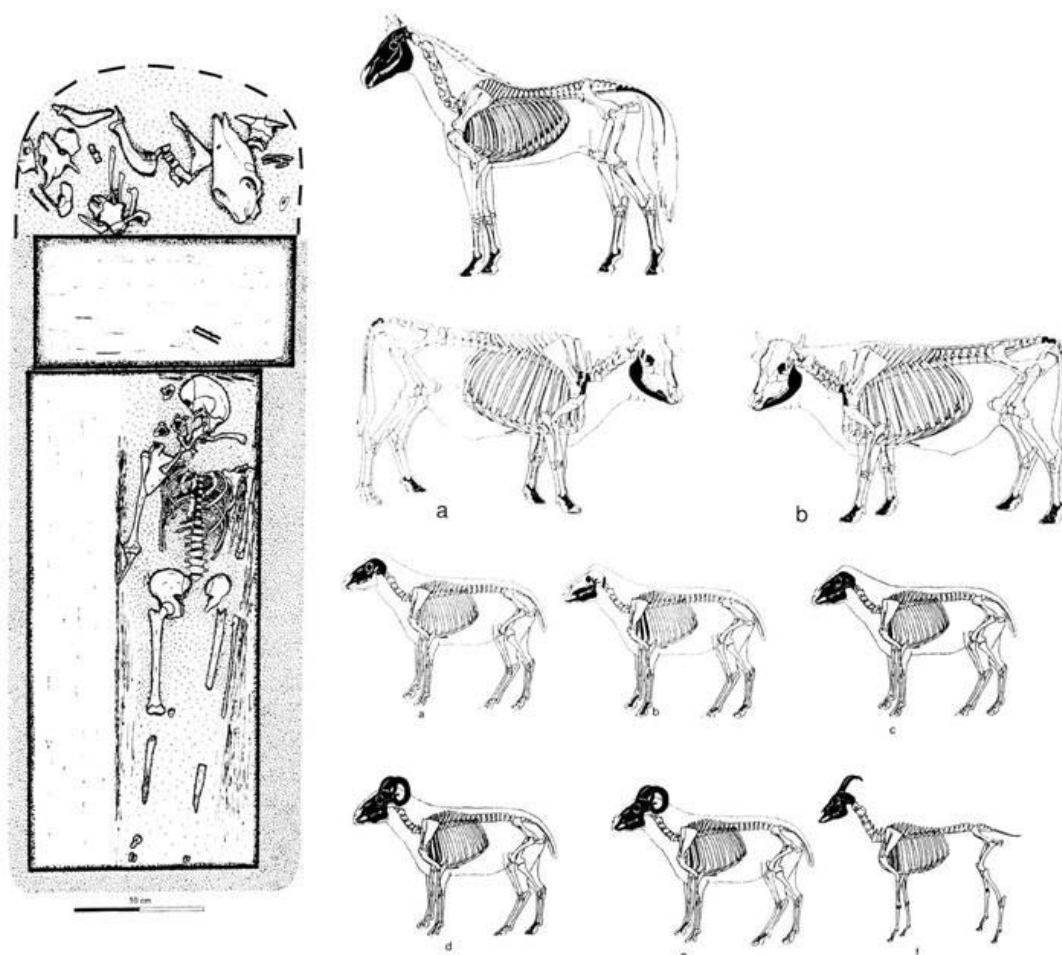


Fig.6.48 Animal remains in grave 15, Burhan tolgoi, Egiin gol (after Crubézy et al. 1996: Figs.12-15)

Another indication of the various rituals and meanings associated with mortuary ceremonies is the differential placement of the remains (Crubézy et al. 1996). One of the more frequent places of deposition was within head niches in the burial pit just outside the coffin [Fig.6.48]. Interments for the deceased often included more than one place of deposition within a single grave. In the example of grave 100 at Ivolga, a sheep/goat skull was placed outside the northern side of the coffin, and sheep/goat ribs and vertebrae were set within the head region of the coffin beside three ceramic pots [Fig.6.35]. Some remains, like the dog skeletons, were placed overtop the coffin. A study of the variances

in depositional space, selection of animals and selection of their portions exhibits the functions of both accompaniment and consumption for the animals in these graves. The ritual offerings of animals for both of these functions represent arenas in which competitive expressions of connections to the deceased may be manifested.

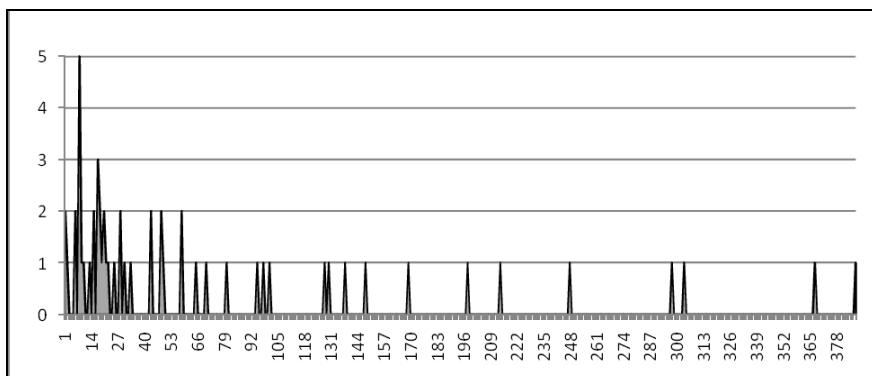


Fig.6.49 Number of graves per burial site (total count) [n=55, Mean=75.16]

Close to a hundred sites have been noted, and often excavated, in the greater area of Eastern Inner Asia. Less than half of these have yielded excavation reports, and of those expeditions which did produce reports, a large portion of them did not conduct surveys or map the site within which they excavated. The resulting number of sites for which we have a total burial count is around half the full amount reported. The resulting nature of the available information does not allow for statistical analyses across the entire region, but we can obtain an approximate understanding of the size of the burial grounds which have been reported. The average cemetery contained less than one hundred graves, and most sites appear to have gravitated toward totals between ten and fifty.⁹⁶ Even for the lower end of the spectrum, these numbers far surpass the amount of burials at sites of

⁹⁶ The cemeteries at the higher end of the spectrum include those with the large tomb complexes.

the slab grave and kurgan cultures which had covered most of the Mongolian steppes in the previous era.

However, these are not on the whole larger than the Bronze Age precedent, they are simply an addition of larger aggregate burial grounds to the landscape. Surveys conducted in the Egiin gol valley found a distribution of very small sites – between one and six graves per site, half being singular grave sites – in the same valley as the larger Burhan tolgoi site, which contains over one hundred graves (Wright et al. 2009; Honeychurch and Amartuvshin 2007). Preliminary surveys in the vicinity of Shombuuziin belchir, a site with thirty-six graves, found a couple of sites with three graves and a handful of single grave sites. A small scale reconnaissance survey in 2007 in the area around the large cemetery of Tahiltin hotgor – a site with thirty-six monumental tombs, forty accompanying graves, and fifty-seven standard circular graves – discovered a few sites between six and twenty-six graves and a number of single graves along the nearby streambeds and ridges (Williams 2008). It seems, then, that the sites which have been reported and studied over the last several decades reflect not the entire spectrum of burial grounds, but rather the spread of principal burial grounds within micro-regions.

Of the numerous burials throughout Mongolia, North China, and South Siberia that have been unearthed, most were minute samplings of graves from the scores of sites. I have therefore chosen two of the three fully excavated cemeteries as my main case studies of the steppe burials:⁹⁷ Burhan tolgoi (BRH) of Egiin gol valley in northern

⁹⁷ The third cemetery is that of Ivolga, but since the graves there are much smaller, contain far less burial goods of the same nature, and are completely without surface demarcation, Derestuy seemed a more appropriate comparison. However, the Ivolga burials raise the issue of an entire tradition of unmarked burials which have gone unnoticed in the steppes and in archaeological investigations. This perhaps would

Mongolia (Torbat et al. 2003), and Derestuy (DRS) in the southern reaches of the Lake Baikal region (Minyaev 1998; Konovalov 1976) [Figs.6.49,50]. Both cemeteries exhibit some amount of group clustering within the site, and each contains over a hundred burials. While this places them outside the realm of the average site size, it provides a broader spectrum of graves and possibly a wider chronological spread to study. Burhan tolgoi has the benefit of the numerous surveys conducted along the valley (Wright 2006; Honeychurch 2004) as well as the extensive sets of absolute dates taken from the burials.

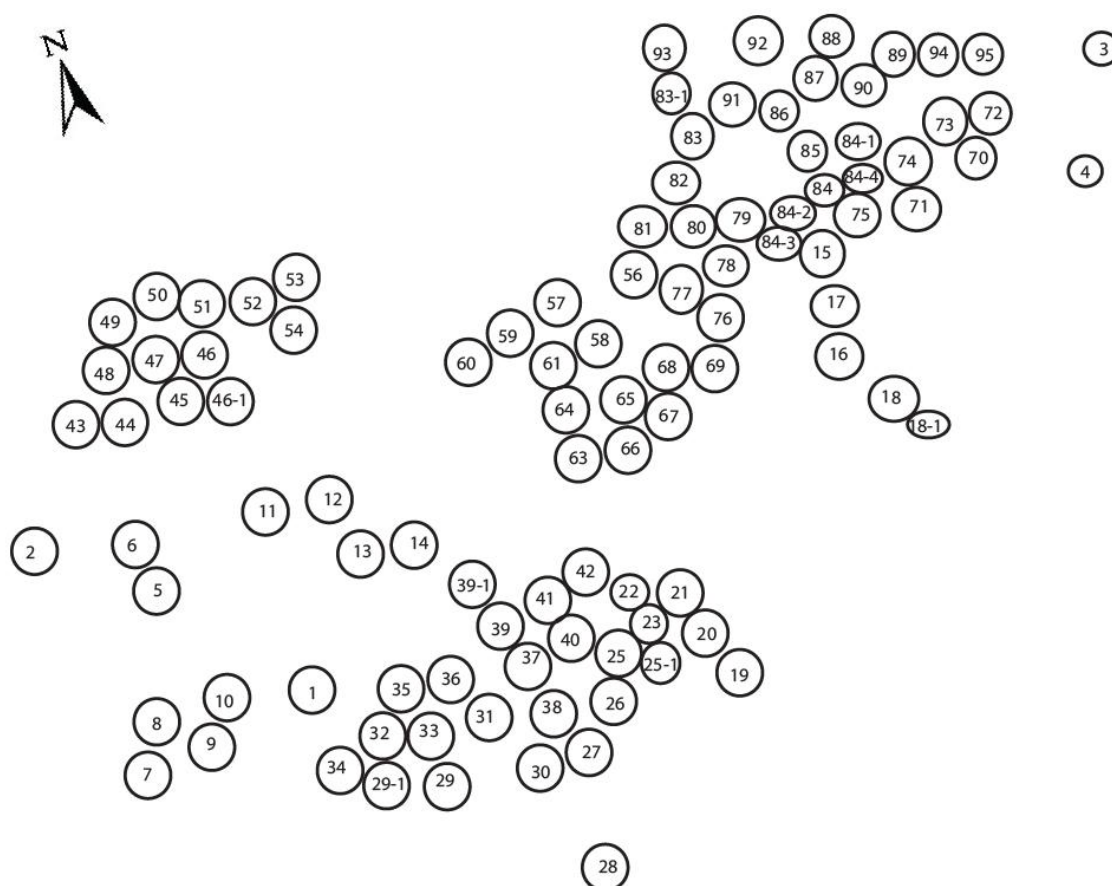


Fig.6.50 Burhan tolgoi cemetery, Egiin gol valley, Mongolia (after Torbat, et al. 2003)

be the beginning of studies of those portions of society beneath the gradations of élite that dominate the known archaeological record.

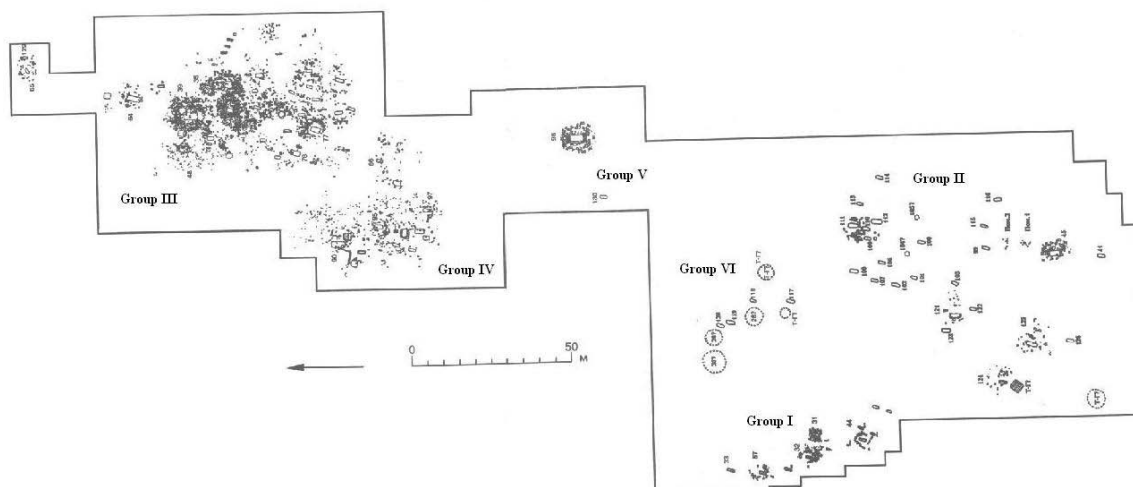


Fig.6.51 Derestuy cemetery, Buryatia, Russia (after Minyaev 1998)

Derestuy does not have the context of intensive surveys, but the thorough degree of investigations at many nearby archaeological sites provide a plethora of regional data for this cemetery south of Lake Baikal. Furthermore, these two cemeteries lie at the center of the concentration of circular burial sites and thus the core of the steppe entity associated with them [Fig.6.52].

Monumental Tomb Complexes

The large mounded tombs of this epoch have attracted the most attention over the last century, and the materials from them were the first to define this ancient period. The excavation of an entire tomb complex thirty years ago broadened the research perspective beyond the burial chamber to include the entire structure of the tomb as well as its associated features (Konovalov 1976, 2008). Excavations in the last ten years have escalated, with several expeditions focusing on these monumental tombs, and some of these studies have revisited the issue of the tomb complex as a whole (Minyaev and

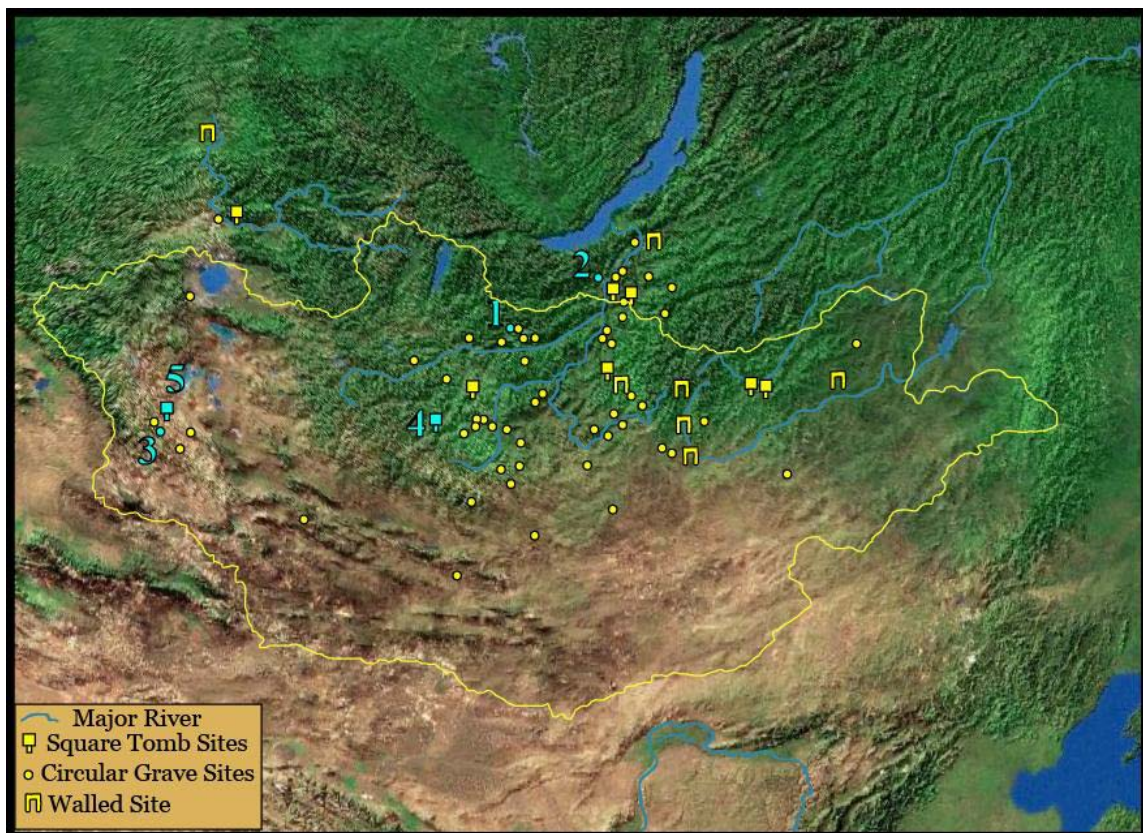


Fig.6.52 Steppe burials and case studies in Eastern Inner Asia: 1. Burhan tolgoi (BRH), 2. Derestuy (DRS), 3. Shombuuziin belchir (SBR), 4. Gol Mod 2 (GM2), 5. Tahiltin hotgor (THL)

Sakharovskaya 2002, 2007; Mission 2003; Yeruul-Erdene 2004; Miller et al. 2006, 2008). In order to separate this kind of extended mortuary space conceptually and semantically from an intricate burial with an array of elements inside a single mound or pit (*complex tomb*), I define a *tomb complex* as a suite of features associated with the interment of a single deceased that together are arranged as one group.

The most prominent and central feature of these complexes is the *square ramped tomb mound* [Fig.6.54]. This earthen mound is oriented approximately north-south and is held together by stone walls around the exterior and often within the mound and into the pit below it. Most of the mounds measure one to two meters in height, though some are

almost level with the ground while others reach as high as four or five meters, and the breadth of these mounds has the same manner of size distribution as the circular graves. [Fig.6.53] A ramp or “funerary path” (Mission 2003) leading up to the top of the mound extends out from the southern wall. This path to the mound is mirrored by one beneath the surface which extends toward the burial pit. The end of the path and the opening to the burial pit is often closed off by a pile of stones or wood, forming a sort of “door” into the grave pit (Konovalov 2008) and objects such as bone toggles (Miller et al. 2008) and burnt, broken mirrors (Minyaev and Sakharovskaya 2007a) have been placed within the construction of this entrance toward the chamber. It should be noted that this underground path does not descend to the point of facing the wooden chamber. It stops at the top of the chamber level [Fig.6.54] or even far above it [Fig.6.60].

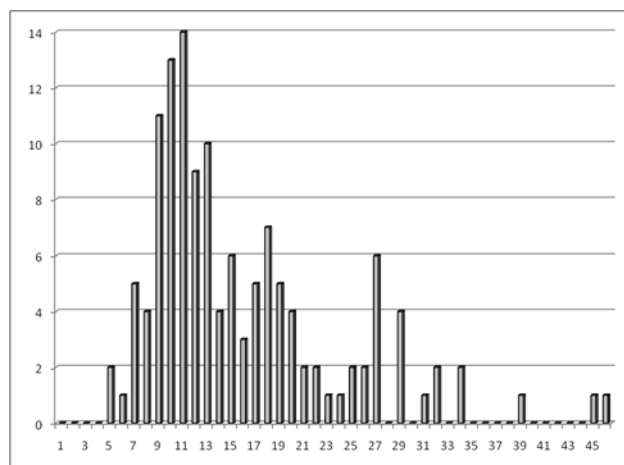


Fig.6.53 Length of square tomb mounds (m) [n=131, Mean=16.38, SD=7.99]

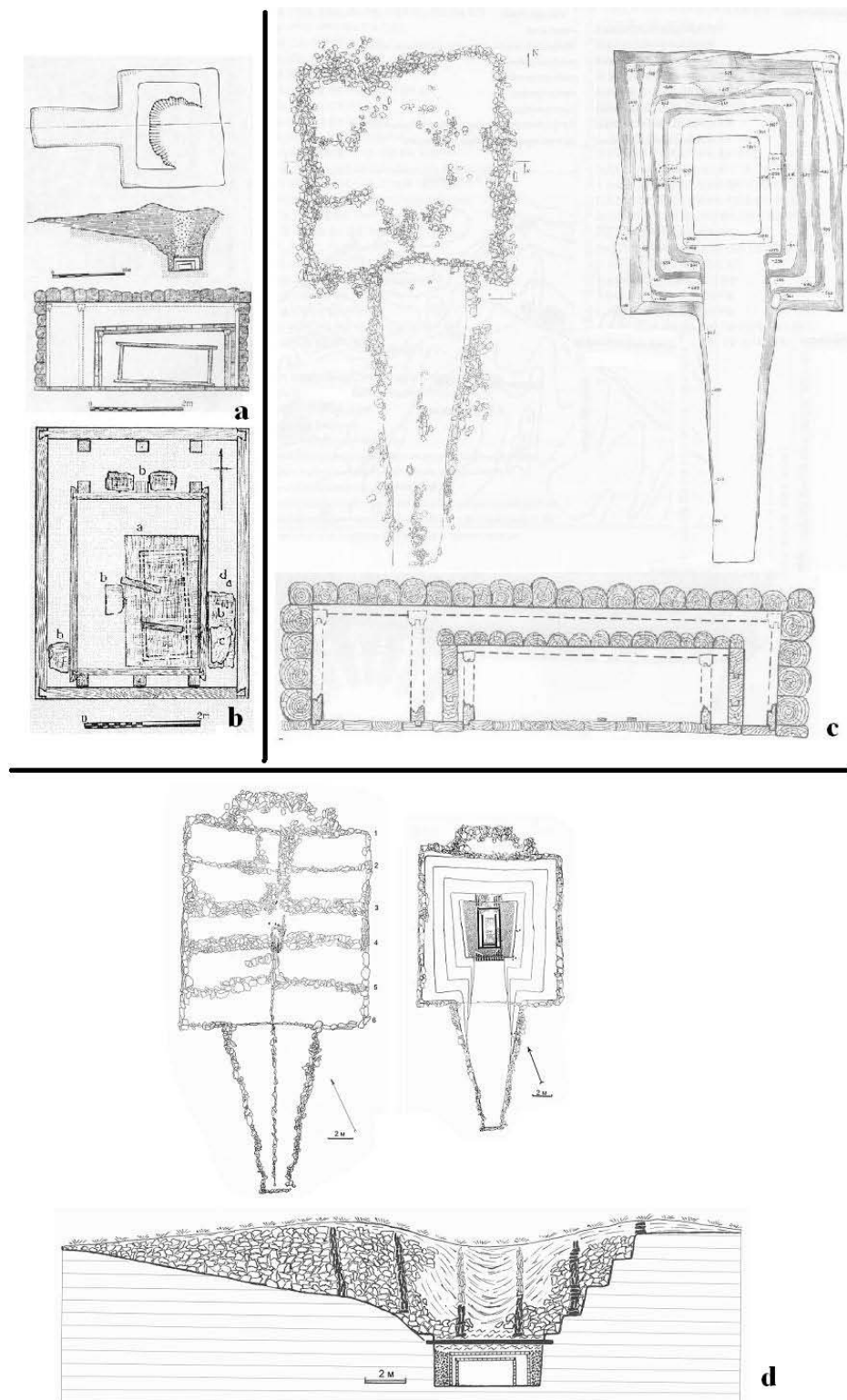


Fig.6.54 Tombs at Noyon uul: (a) tomb 1 mound and chamber, (b) tomb 6 chamber (Umehara 1960); (c) tomb 20 (Polos'mak 2008); Il'movaya pad' tomb 54 (Konovalov 2008)

The tomb mounds often have stone lines that run north-south and east-west across the surface with some variability in the patterns of lines (Erdenebaatar 2000), though the most recurring instance being a north-south line running through the center of the ramp and the mound. Beneath these tomb mounds and under numerous layers of stone, earth, and/or wood, lies a double nested burial chamber with a decorated wooden coffin inside [Fig.6.53]. Most of the tombs were furnished with a double log chamber, where an extravagant array of items were deposited, and the coffin bore the same latticework and quatrefoil decoration seen on some of the coffins in the circular graves [Fig.6.46]. The collections of these items are extremely varied and subjected to heavy looting, though some general similarities in the assemblages can be seen. Most of the tombs contain the remains of a chariot laid overtop the tomb chamber, and these coincide with the deposition of the heads and lower legs of horses [Fig.6.56]. A substantial number of horse, cattle and sheep/goat remains have also been found on ledges just above and to the north of the chamber, much in the same way they were deposited in a head niche for the circular graves. In this case the numbers are much greater, but keep with the tradition of heads and hooves. A variety of luxury goods – lacquered and bronze objects from China, silver and gold inlaid objects from further west, and garments and tapestries of silk, fur or felt bearing Greco-Roman designs, steppe animal art, or Chinese characters – along with the monumental size of these tombs sets them far apart from the previously outlined circular graves. This clear separation, as mentioned above, does not denote a difference between the élite as a whole and the remaining commoner masses. The ostentatious

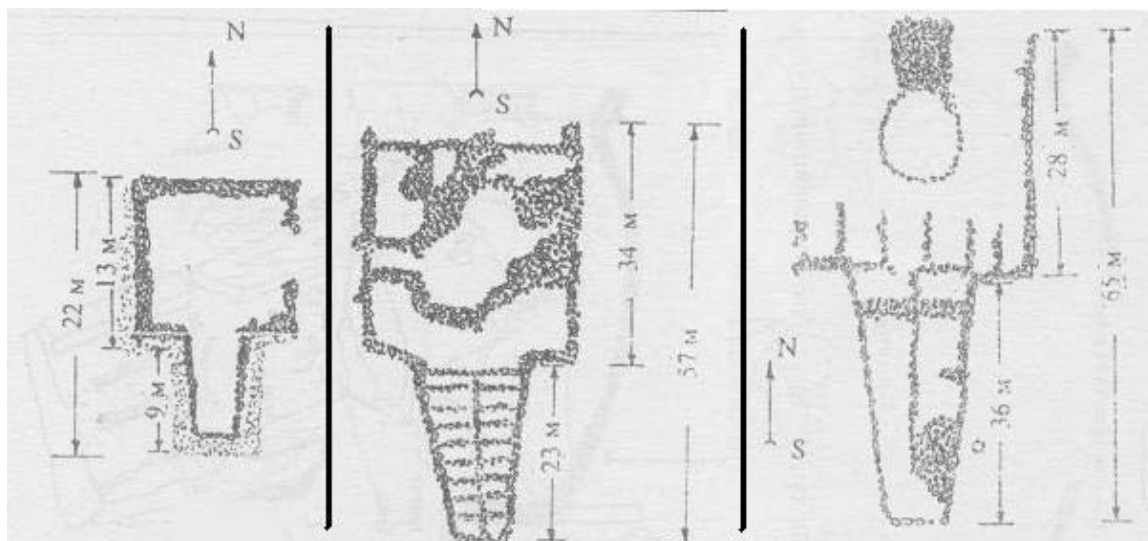


Fig.6.55 Tomb mounds at Gol Mod (Erdenebaatar 2000: fig.8)

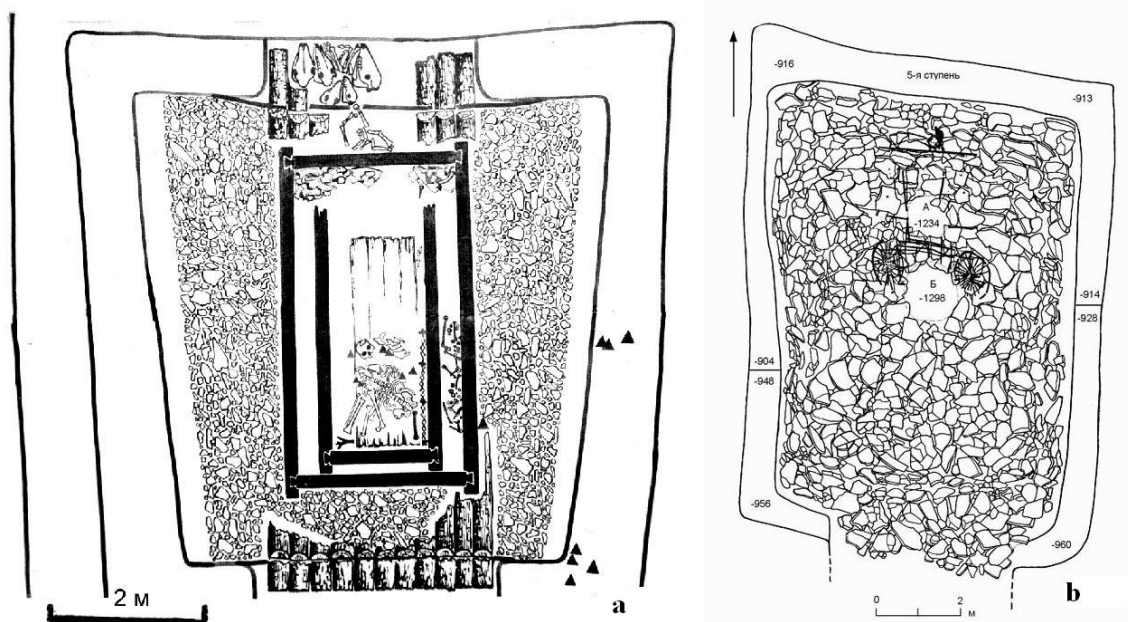


Fig.6.56 Tomb chambers of (a) tomb 54, Il'movaya pad' (Konovalov 2008) and (b) tomb 7 Tsaram (Minyaev and Sakharovskaya 2007)

assemblage of imported and local luxury goods is not only a display of wealth and status. It is a demonstration of that status through the ritualized interactions which utilize many of these accoutrements to articulate political power and (re)define the social and

economic networks through which it is obtained through new forms of social practice, identity construction, and possibly commensal politics.

Small graves adjacent to the larger tombs have been excavated at several of the elite cemeteries in Mongolia and Buryatia, and recent studies have begun to address them directly as a particular phenomenon (Minyaev and Sakharovskaya 2002; Miller et al. 2006). These *satellite burials* average about three per tomb complex and are usually arranged in a north-south line to the east, west, or both sides of the main tomb [Fig.6.57]. A few instances of significantly large lines of accompanying burials exist at Gol Mod 2 cemetery in Arhangai (Miller et al. 2006) and confirm the arc-shape of these arrangements of burials which flank the tomb mounds [Fig.6.58]. These satellite burials on the whole resemble the more standard graves, bearing surface demarcations of stone rings and thus placing them in the same general category as the circular graves. However, some, as discovered at Tahiltin hotgor (Miller et al. 2008), are marked only by a cluster of stones [Fig.6.60]. Whether this marks an entirely different category of burials remains to be seen, but will be investigated through further excavations in the Mongolian Altai.

The third feature of tomb complexes – *stone lines* – was discovered at Gol Mod 2 cemetery (Allard et al. 2002) and subsequently at Tahiltin hotgor in 2006 [Fig.6.61]. The high degree of surface visibility allowed by the minimal or no grass cover at these two sites – as opposed to the dense forests overtop sites such as Noyon uul and Il'movaya pad' – have allowed for their discovery, yet it is possible that this feature exists at other

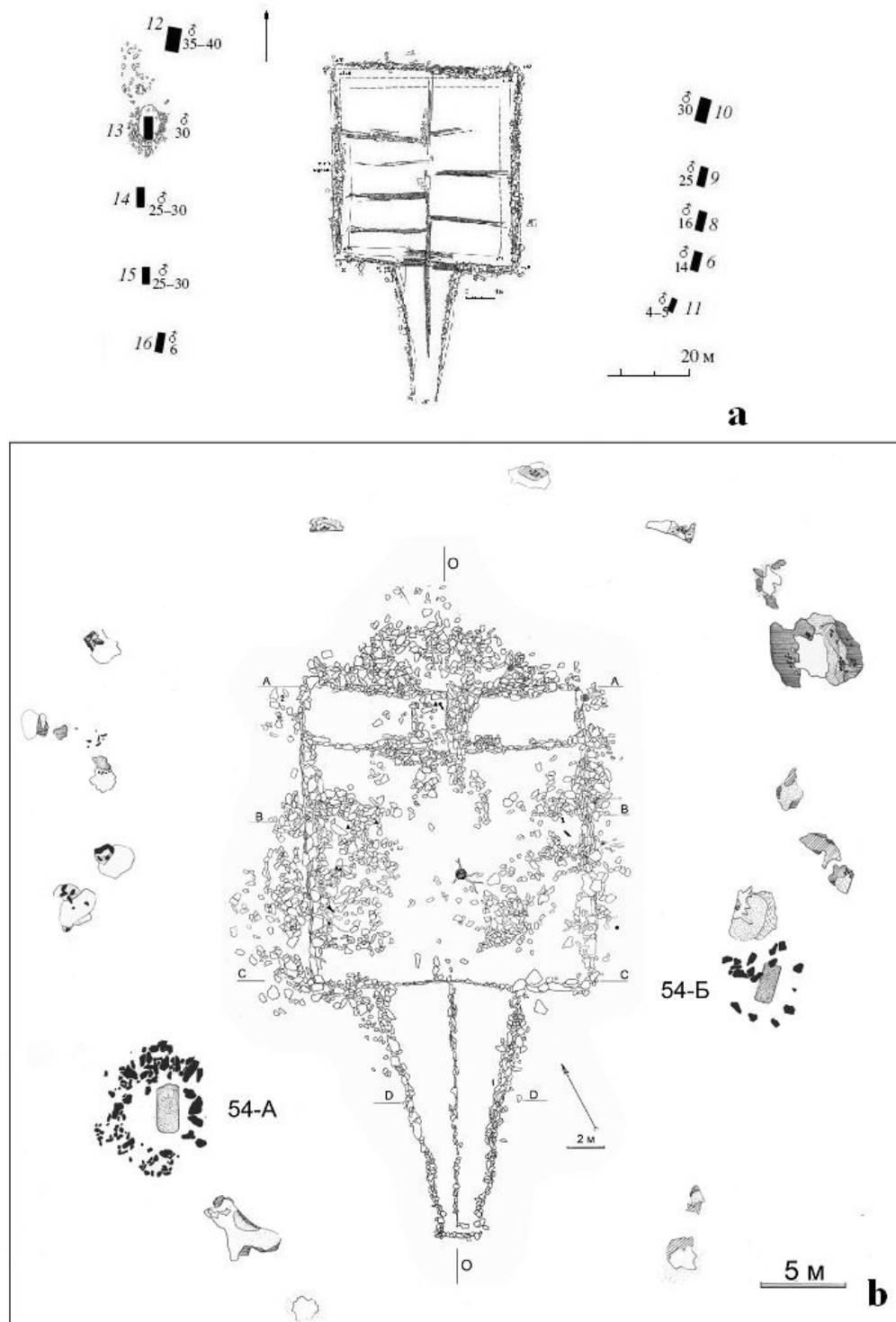


Fig.6.57 Tomb mounds and satellite burials: Tsaram tomb 7 complex (Minyaev and Sakharovskaya 2007); Il'movaya pad' tomb 54 complex (Konovalov 2008)

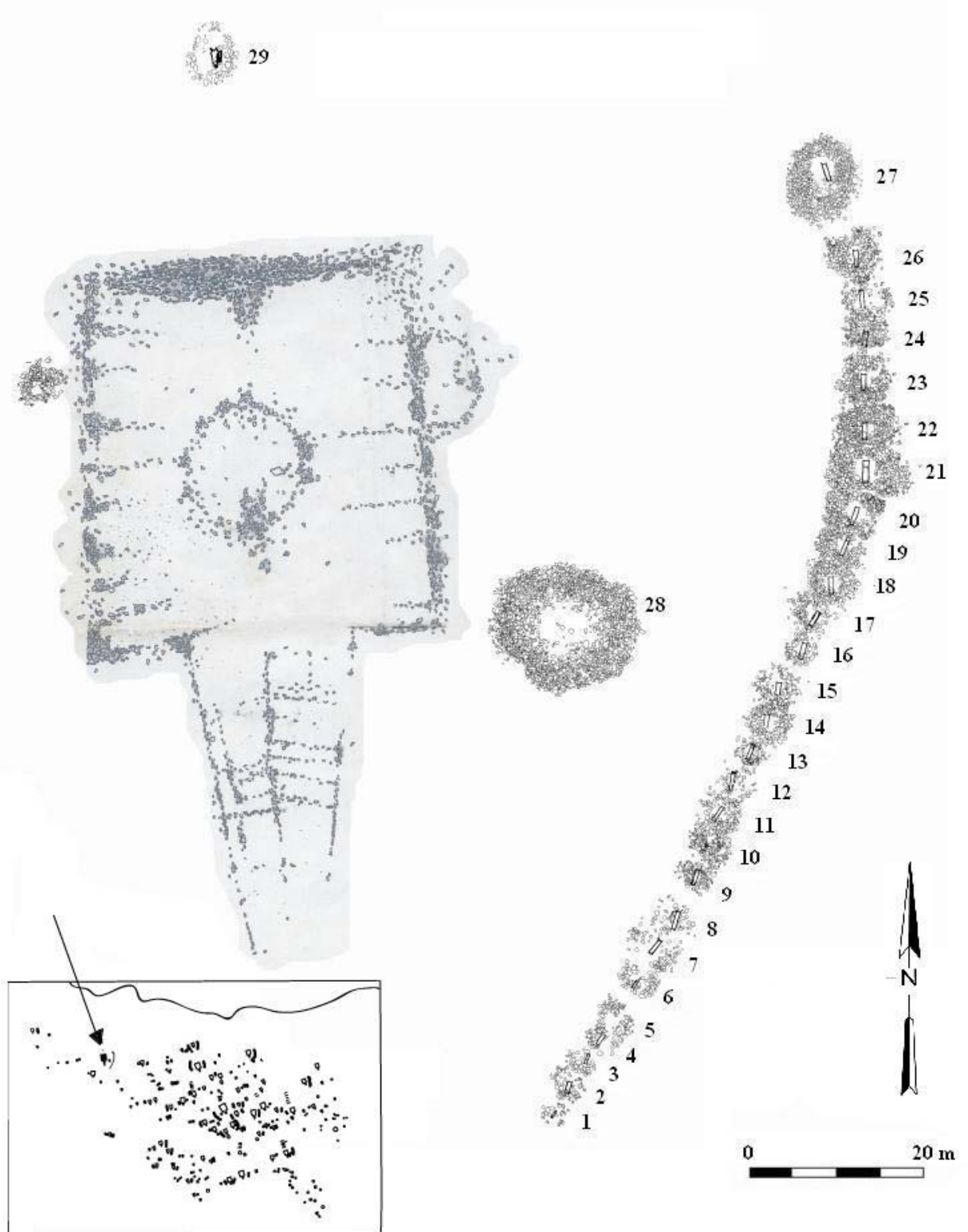


Fig.6.58 Gol Mod 2 tomb 1 complex (Miller et al. 2006)

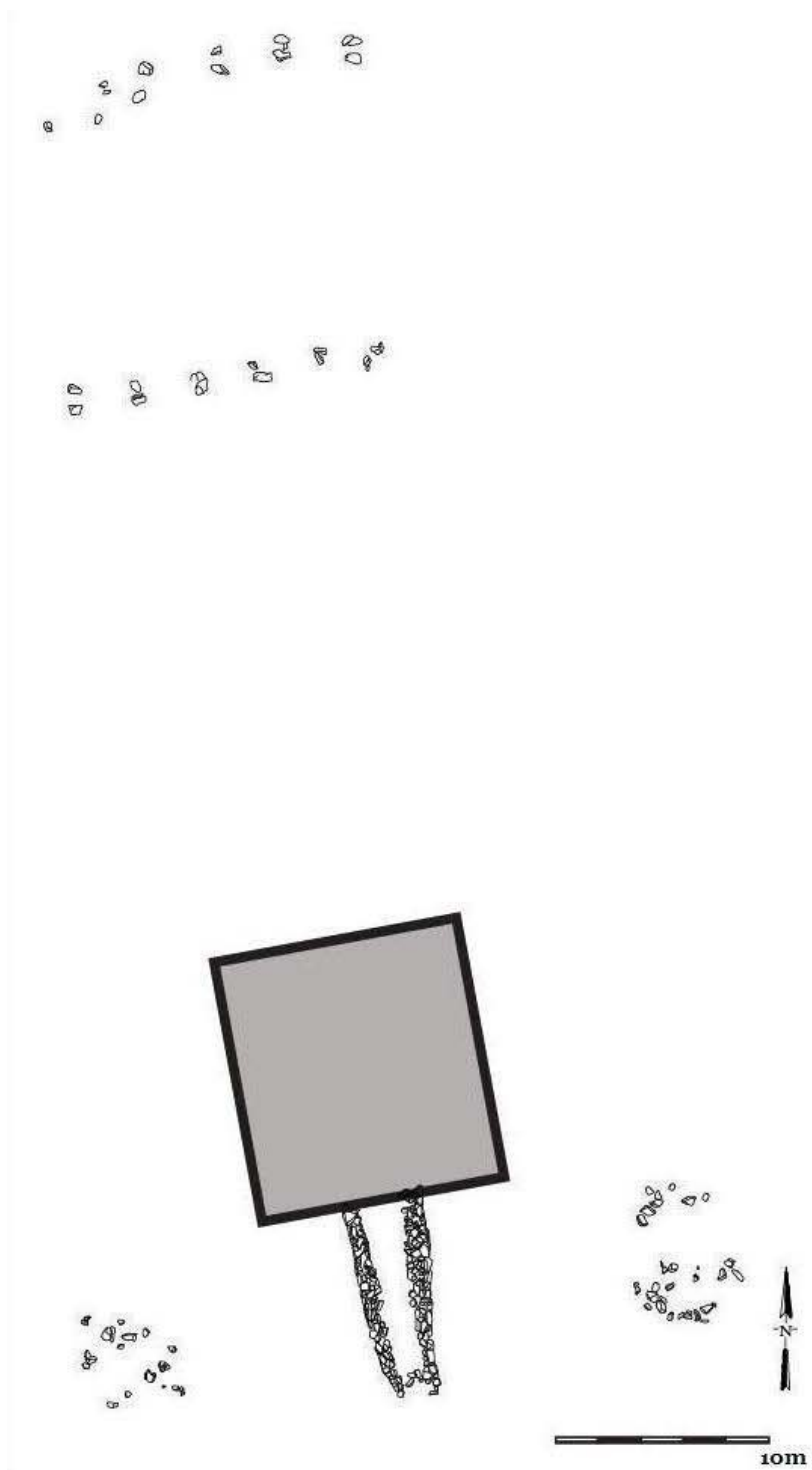


Fig.6.59 Tahiltin hotgor tomb 82 complex (Miller et al. 2008)

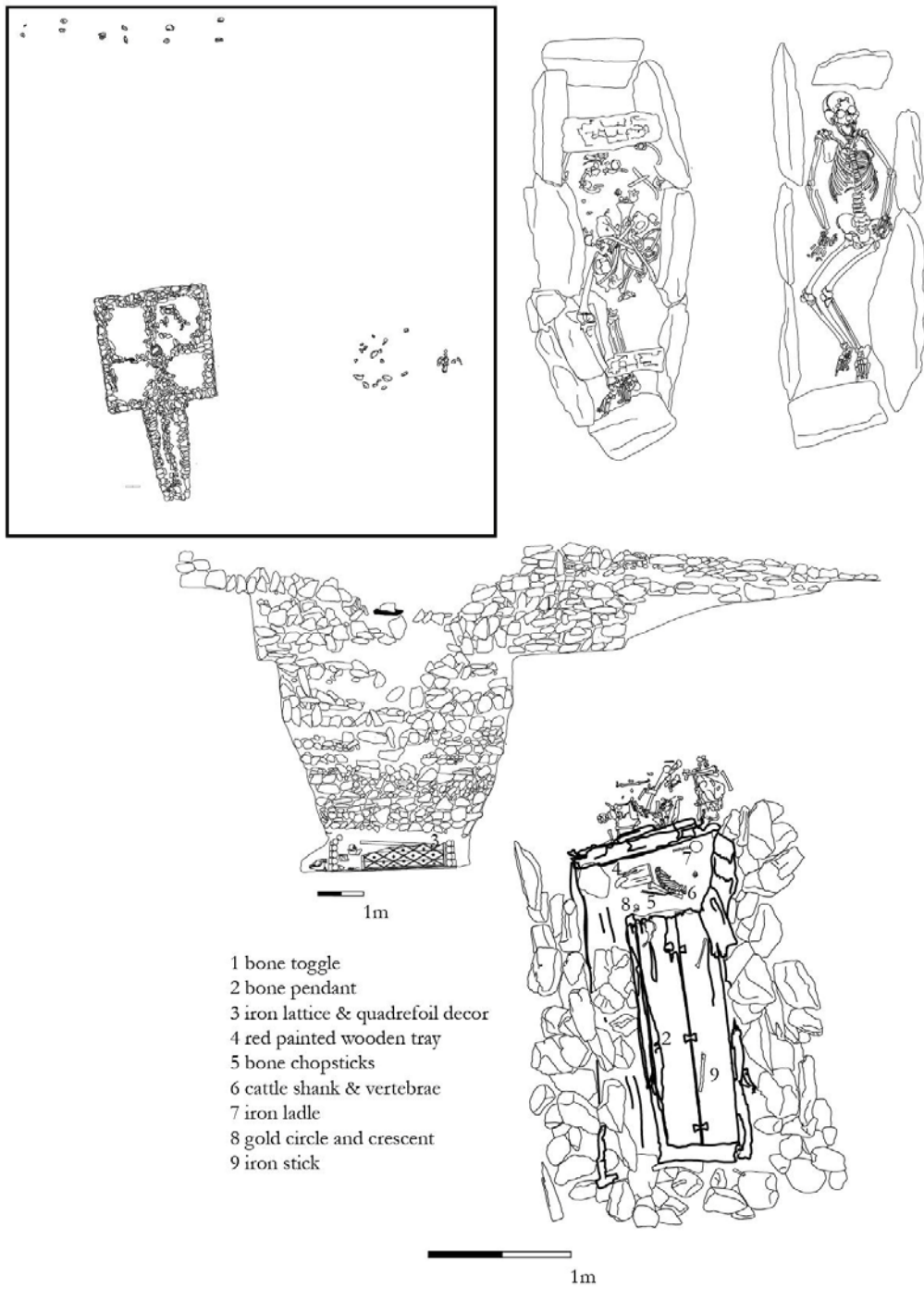


Fig.6.60 Tahiltin hotgor tomb 64 complex (Miller et al. 2008)

cemeteries with large tomb mounds. Parallel east-west lines of stone pairs are arranged north of some of the tomb mounds at both these cemeteries [Fig.6.59], and these lines were excavated for the first time in 2007 at Tahiltin hotgor (Miller et al. 2008). Between many of the pairs of stones in tomb complexes 64 and 82 were found deposits of ash, charcoal, and highly fired tiny fragments of burnt animal bone [Fig.6.59,60]. These deposits bear a striking resemblance to the deposits of burnt, crushed animal bones found within small circles of several stones surrounding the large khirigsuur complexes of Bronze Age central Mongolia (Allard and Erdenebaatar 2005) [Fig.6.2]. The lines do not occur at most of the tombs surveyed at Gol Mod 2 and Tahiltin hotgor, and their presence does not accord strictly with the larger tombs. This incongruity may be similar to those seen in the outliers of amount of animals offered to the deceased, and both doubtless relate to the competition inherent in the funerary rites performed by the living for the dead.

The grandiose mounds, cavernous pits, complex chambers, and extravagant burial assemblages unearthed at over a dozen large tombs supply us with enough information to engage in a serious discussion of the origin of these monumental burials and implications of their presence and possessions. While the sites of Gol Mod 2 (GM2) and Tahiltin hotgor (THL) are not counted among the more plentiful findings from excavation, their square tomb complexes have all three above mentioned features and represent both the largest and smallest tomb complexes, respectively [Fig.6.61]. Both sites were completely surveyed in 2001 and 2006, and I will use the data on the size and distribution of all the features within to make inferences about the nature of the large sites and the relationship

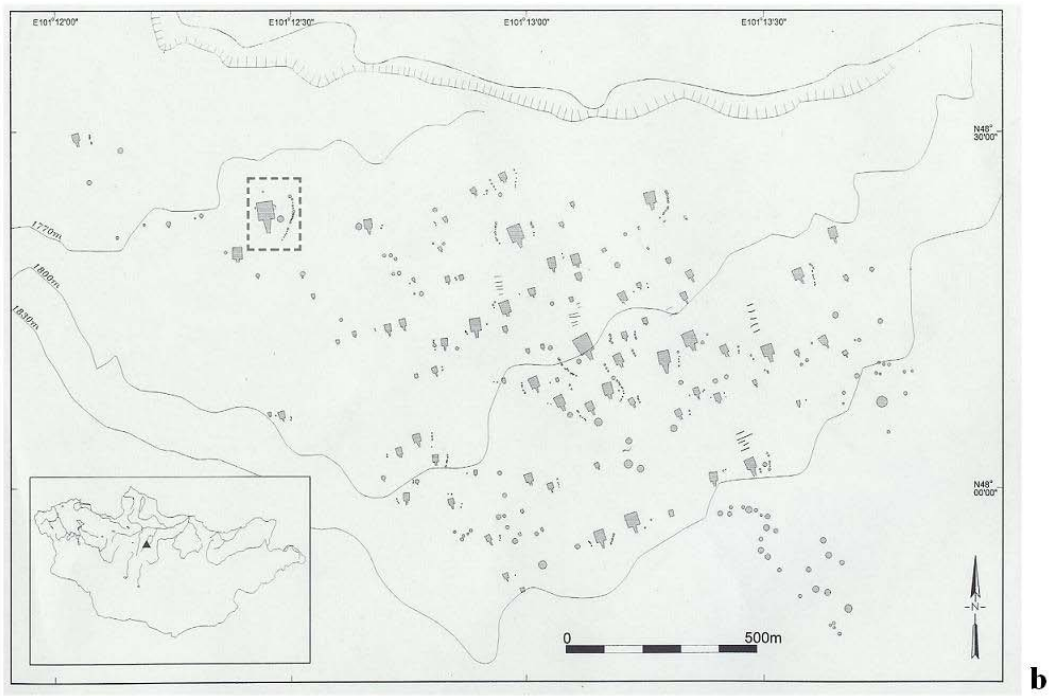
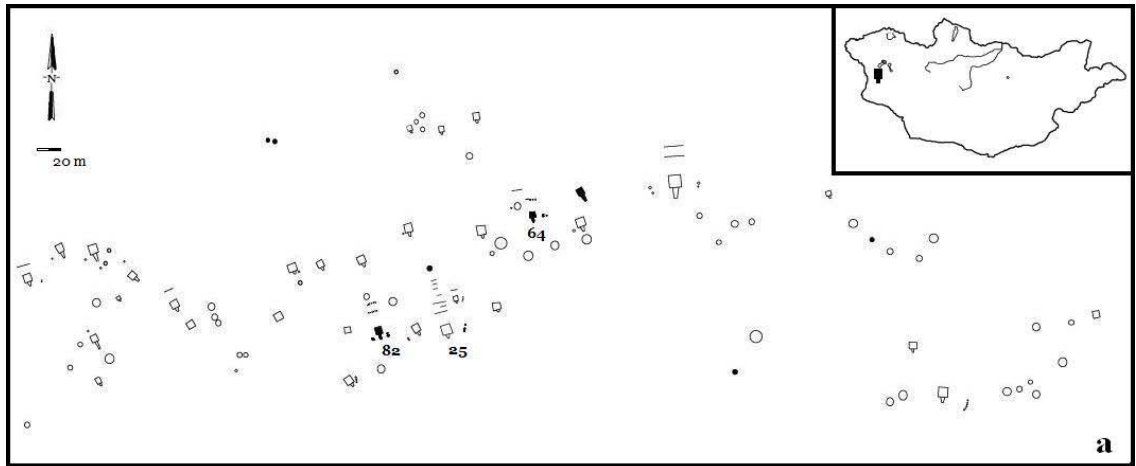
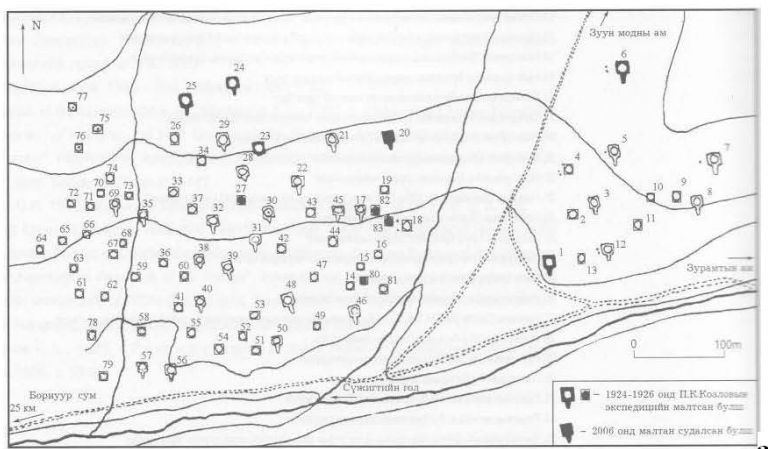
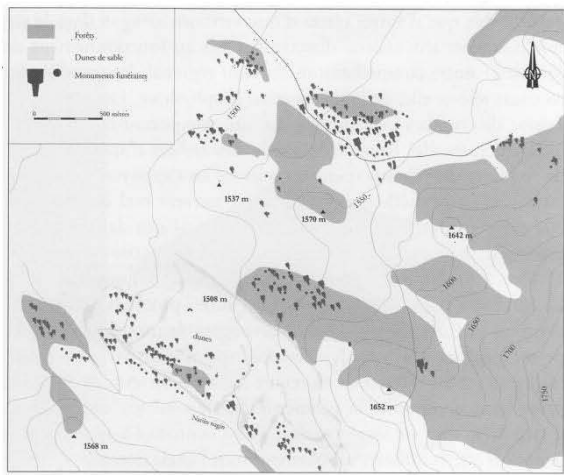


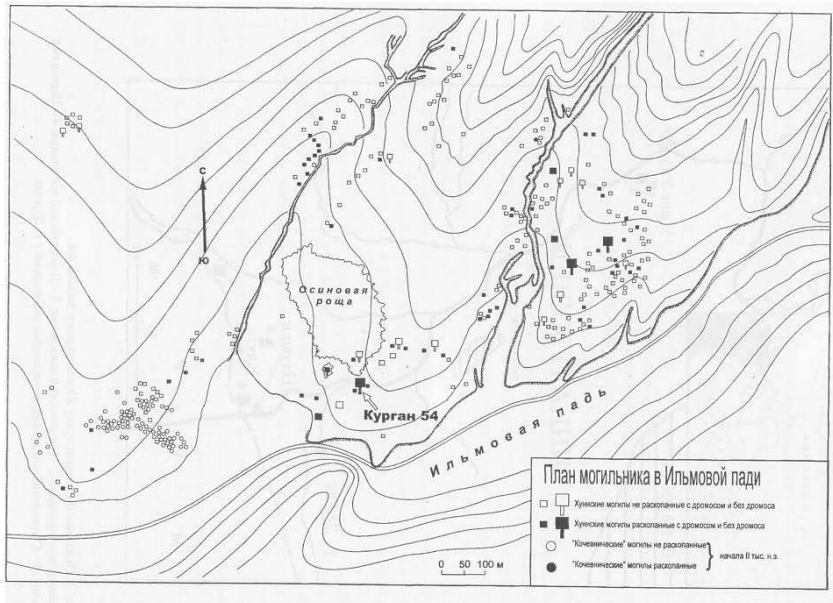
Fig6.61 Tahiltin hotgor (Miller et al. 2008) and Gol Mod 2 (Allard et al. 2002)



a



b



c

Рис. 2. План Суджинского могильника в Ильмовой пади

Fig.6.62 Noyon uul (Polos'mak 2008), Gol Mod (Mission 2007), Il'movaya pad' (Konovalov 2008)

between the square tomb mound complexes and the circular graves within these burial grounds.

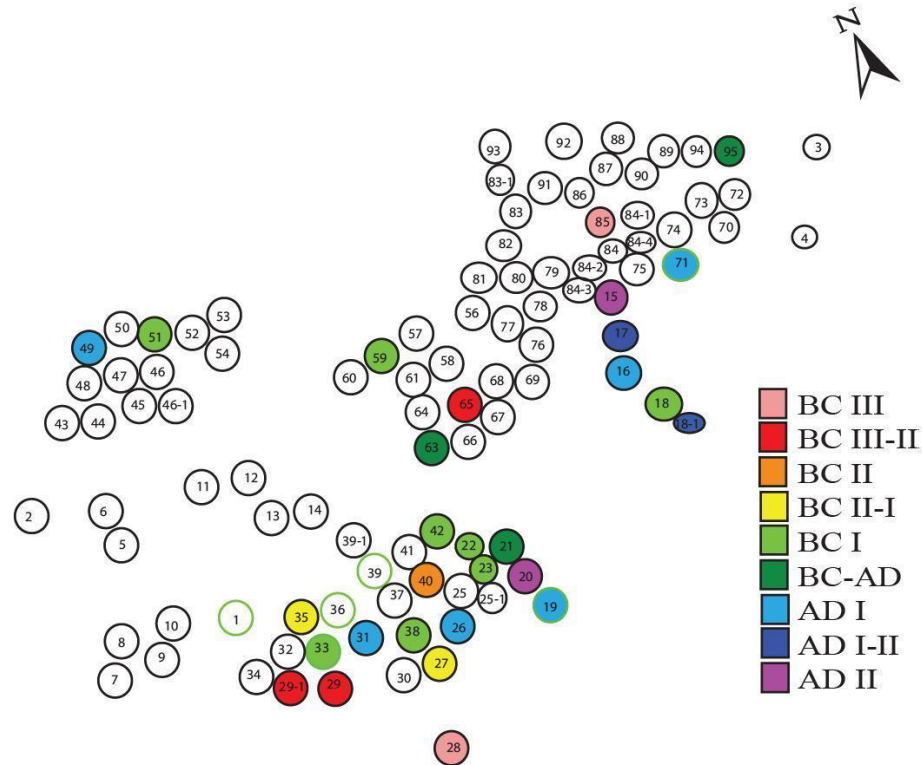
Defining the Steppe Entity in Time and Space

Chronological Spread

A chronological understanding of the material is necessary to adequately answer the above questions, but a temporal delineation of the remains may also raise new questions. Since the site of Burhan tolgoi, and the surrounding Egiin gol valley, has by far the most number of absolute dates taken, I shall address this cemetery first in outlining an overall chronology of the material. Not every grave at the site was dated by the Carbon-14 method (^{14}C), but a sufficient sequence can be drawn.⁹⁸ According to the ^{14}C dates, the site spans from the third century BC to the second century AD, with the majority of dates falling in the range of the first century BC to the first century AD [Fig.6.63]. Since the relative chronology of Chinese bronze mirrors is fairly well understood,⁹⁹ archaeologists have often used their presence in the burials for relative dates. The mirrors found here include a variety that spans from the middle of the Western Han Chinese Empire (around 100 BC), through the Xin dynasty interregnum, and into the early Eastern Han dynastic period (up until about 100 AD): the *riguang* 日光, *siru* 四乳, *zhaoming* 昭明, and *guiju* 規矩 (so-called TLV) style mirrors. In an attempt to utilize the

⁹⁸ Honeychurch (2004: 133-134) has suggested that a couple of the later ^{14}C dates are outliers due to contamination, and sought to test the overall results of the dating conducted by the French Mongolian project (Torbat et al. 2003). A fluorite calculation yielded a range of 450 BC to 250 AD. This appears to encompass the earlier dates of the Egiin gol habitation sites, dated 4th century BC to 1st century AD (Honeychurch 2004: 131-132), as well as the dates of the graves at Burhan tolgoi.

⁹⁹ Lai (2006) identifies certain flaws and holes in the presently-used chronology, addressing the need for reassessments, but recognizes the general utility of the system for dating that does not expect fine dating ascriptions, such as the case of dating burials of the steppes.



Color within the circles indicates the absolute date.
Color of the circle exteriors indicates relative dates.

Comp ID	¹⁴ C Date	Chinese bronze mirror	Period
BRH-85	361-201 BC		BC 3
BRH-28	363-203 BC		BC 3
BRH-29-1	335-69 BC		BC 3-2
BRH-29	343-119 BC		BC 3-2
BRH-65	355-94 BC		BC 3-2
BRH-40	357 BC - 66 AD		BC 2
BRH-35	180-32 BC		BC 2-1
BRH-27	351-107 BC		BC 2-1
BRH-33B	112-3 BC	zhaoming (mid-late W.Han)	BC 1 / p. BC 1
BRH-33A	113 BC - 9 AD		BC 1
BRH-51	154 BC - 17 AD		BC 1
BRH-59	156 BC - 75 AD		BC 1
BRH-38B	158 BC - 67 AD		BC 1
BRH-23	158-49 BC		BC 1
BRH-22	92 BC - 20 AD		BC 1
BRH-18	93 BC - 14 AD		BC 1
BRH-42	96 BC - 9 AD		BC 1
BRH-21	31 BC - 71 AD		BC-AD
BRH-95	34 BC - 56 AD		BC-AD
BRH-63	92 BC - 61 AD		BC-AD
BRH-71	1-133 AD	riguang (post HanWudi - Xin)	AD 1 / p. BC-AD
BRH-16	1-82 AD		AD 1
BRH-19	25 BC - 147 AD	siru (mid W.Han - early E.Han)	AD 1 / p. BC 1
BRH-49	30 BC - 113 AD		AD 1
BRH-31B	34 BC - 69 AD		BC-AD (AD 1)
BRH-31A	4 BC - 61 AD		AD 1
BRH-26	4 BC - 77 AD		AD 1
BRH-18-1	60-191 AD		AD 1-2
BRH-17	66-125 AD		AD 1-2
BRH-20	85-212 AD		AD 2
BRH-15	87-309 AD		AD 2
BRH-1		siru (mid W.Han - early E.Han)	p. BC 1
BRH-36		guiju TLV (late W.Han - Xin)	p. BC-AD
BRH-39		riguang (post HanWudi - Xin)	p. BC-AD

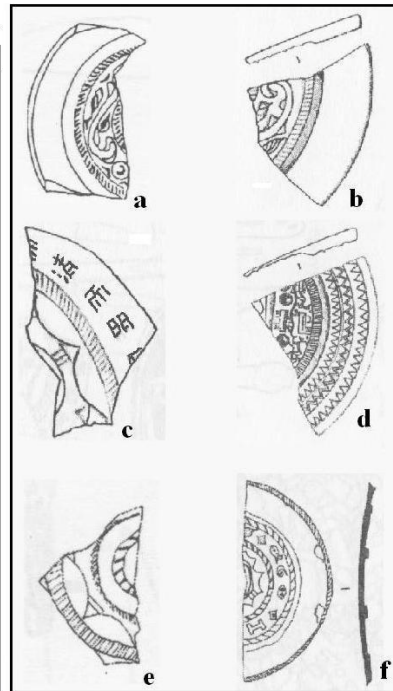


Fig.6.63 Absolute (¹⁴C) and relative dating for Burhan tolgoi cemetery; Chinese bronze mirrors from (a) BRH-1 (b) BRH-19 (c) BRH-33 (d) BRH-36 (e) BRH-39 (f) BRH-71 (after Torbat et al. 2003)

mirrors available at Burhan tolgoi, I will also test them against the absolute dates for graves in which both dating methods are possible.

The date of the *zhaoming* mirror in BRH-33 seems to match the ^{14}C date given, but the mirrors in graves BRH-19 and BRH-71 appear to predate the absolute dates determined for those graves. This difference is not significant enough to suggest a serious error in either dating method, and such discrepancy has often been explained by the concept of heirlooms. In this case the mirrors would have passed through the possession of more than one person before being deposited in to the grave. Since the difference looks to be only a half a century maximum in BRH-71, it is possible that it was not handed down. There is potentially a difference of one hundred years in the case of BRH-19, but an examination of the ranges for both absolute and relative dates exhibit an overlap that might be more plausible. What remains essential for the chronological discussion, however, is that these mirrors did not seem to be handed down for numerous generations. They not only provide a *terminus post quem* for the burials in which they are found, but also most likely reflect more or less the period range of those burials.

I will now compare a few of the artifact categories mentioned in the overview of mortuary material, and relative dates, against the chronological range available with the Burhan tolgoi data. The sizes of the circular graves show no indication of any increase or decrease over time, and neither do the depths. The mirrors are found within the peak of the number of burials, i.e. between first century BC to first century AD. Chinese lacquer cups are found within approximately the same time span, though it is interesting to note the find of a non-Chinese wooden cup in a burial dated to the third century BC (BRH-28). By looking at the number of graves and the amount of imported goods, the cemetery

seems to peak in the core two centuries, though the site is clearly occupied from as early as the fourth century BC. When combined with the dates from settlement surveys we gain a picture of the Iron Age occupation of the valley where Burhan tolgoi sits. Remains of seasonal habitation sites as early as the fourth century BC coincide with the earlier phase of the cemetery. Somewhere around the same time that the number of graves and imported goods increases, a walled site at Holtost Hurem appears (Hall et al. 2003). Whether this was a fort or a ritual site, it characterizes a different form of habitation in the valley starting as early as the mid second century BC.

A collection of Chinese mirrors similar in types and time span to those at Burhan tolgoi were found at the sites of Il'movaya pad' and Chremohovaya pad' in the Sudjy area of Buryatia. Along with the presence of inscribed Chinese lacquer fragments, these sites have also been dated to the first century BC to first century AD. The mirror fragments from Ivolga walled site, on the other hand, date between the early to middle Western Han. The numerous bronze *wuzhu* 五銖 coins from China found here and elsewhere throughout the steppes place an additional cap on the dating of these sites, limiting those with such coins to no earlier than the middle Western Han when the Chinese began minting them.

Konovalov (1976) has proposed a division of the sites in Buryatia into an early phase associated with Derestuy and Ivolga and a late phase associated with the two aforementioned Sudjy sites. Minyaev (1988) argues against the delineation of an early and late period for these remains, and it would seem that Pan (2007), in her criticism of drawing lines in these periods according to a change in grave furnishing and structure, would

agree. Through a comparative analysis of the artifacts in South Siberia, and a confirmation against well sequenced Chinese artifacts, Pan corroborates Konovalov's previous proposal of two periods, but instead according to a change in burial goods. To this argument for periodization, I would add an emphasis on the shifts in style of the mainstream items like bridle cheek pieces – shifting from S-curved to long flat ended [Fig.6.30] – and the storage pottery – from B_i to B_{ii} style of narrow-neck pots [Fig.6.22a]. This would imply that there is relatively no change in the burial customs of these standard burials, only a change in the luxury and personal goods such as lacquer cups and bone chopsticks.

The remaining chronological issue for the Iron Age burials of the northern steppes is how the monumental tombs fit in to the scheme devised among the more standard graves. Do they exhibit any change over time in their structure or contents? Do they appear to have any chronological limitations different from the more common graves? The tomb complex at Tsaraam has several ¹⁴C dates which approximate a date of late first century BC to early first century AD. This is corroborated with the two broken mirrors – a *siru* and *riguang* – which provide a *terminus post quem* of the first century BC (Minyaev and Sakharovskaya 2007a). A broken *guiju* TLV mirror discovered in one of the satellite graves of tomb 1 complex matches the ¹⁴C date from one of the other satellite graves given as early first century AD (Miller et al. 2006). A broken and burnt TLV mirror was found in tomb 20 at Gol Mod cemetery (Mission 2007), and a *siru* mirror was found in tomb 25 at Noyon uul. Again, the absolute dates do not appear very far off from the relative dates, and we can begin to circumscribe the monumental tombs between the late first century BC and first century AD.

An even more absolute, though non-scientific, date can be obtained from inscriptions that sometimes provide exact years. Two Chinese lacquer ear-cups from the tombs at Noyon uul have inscriptions marking their production at imperial workshops in the year 2 BC (Umehara 1960: 28-34), and a similar find from Tsaraam has an inscription which, by its contents, dates the cup between 8 BC and 4 AD (Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens 2007). Some of the un-inscribed lacquer cups in these monumental tombs can be dated stylistically to more mass production in the early Eastern Han (Barbieri-Low 2001). In any case, lacquers occur frequently during the period of late first century BC to early first century AD (Louis 2007), and this time scheme matches those provided by Chinese mirrors and ¹⁴C dating.

These analyses together outline a chronology of burials in the northern steppes which appears to begin in the fourth century and continues with a tradition of burial form, mortuary rituals, and treatment of the body which do not appear to alter greatly over time. Instead of a noticeable change in the burial structures, we see changes in the grave goods assemblages starting in the second to first century BC. The most striking alteration to the mortuary record is undoubtedly the sudden appearance of monumental and ostentatious tomb complexes in the mid to late first century BC. They more or less coincide with the change in burial assemblages of the standard circular graves. In the following chapters I will examine this dramatic shift in the mortuary record and attempt to explain both the causes and mechanisms for this change as they relate to power politics within and around the steppes. These fluctuations in the archaeological record, it will be argued, correlate to the changes in social and political spheres, and the character of the mortuary record may thus be a means to understand the dynamics of a changing empire.

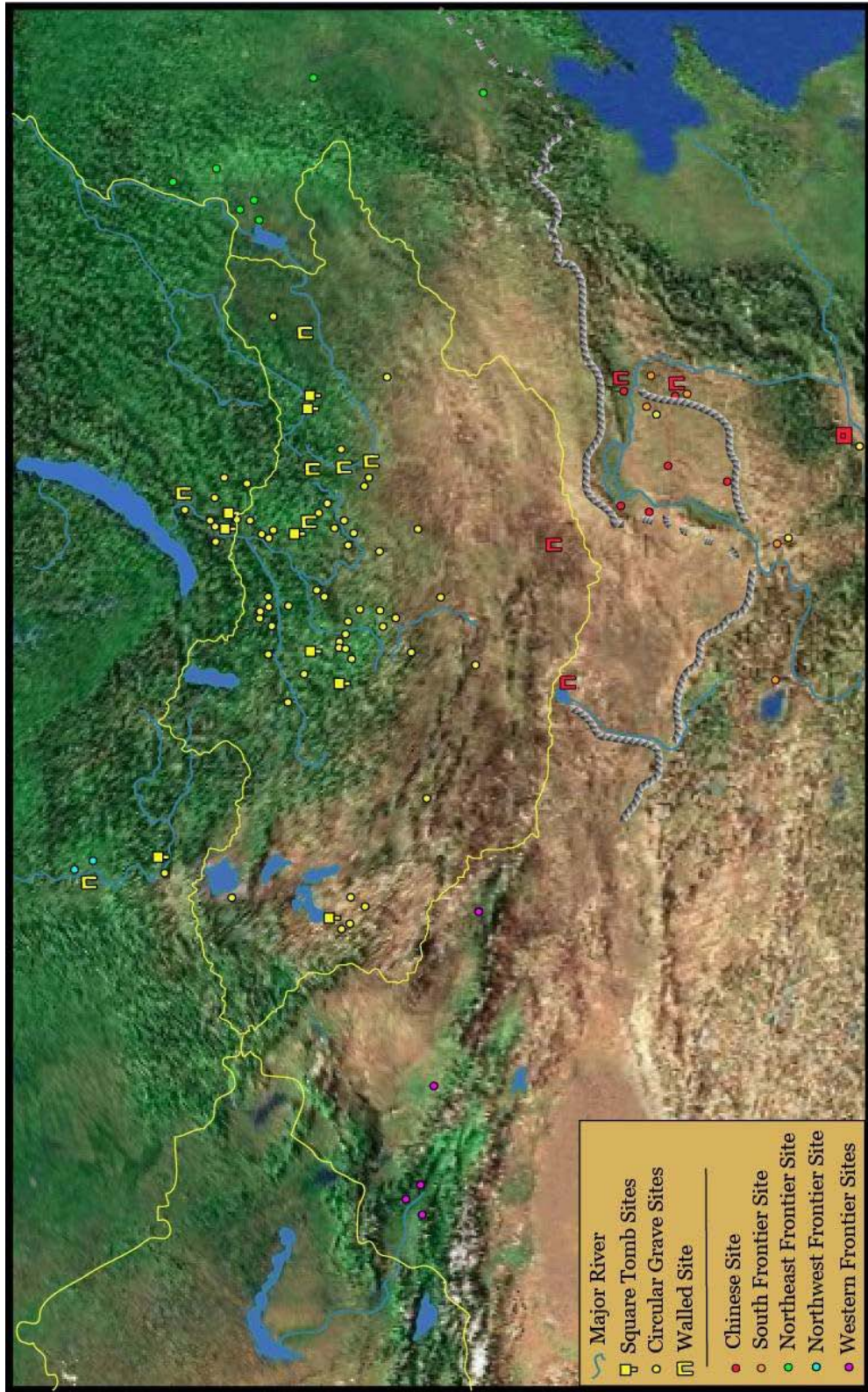


Fig.6.64 Circle and Square Burials of the Mongolian steppes and the surrounding sites

Spatial Spread

As argued above, the burials which constitute the majority of the presently available material for this period are not those of the so-called common people set opposite the “élite” in the mounded tombs.¹⁰⁰ They represent gradations of people within the society who held significant social status. The goal of this dissertation is not to reconstruct the full spectrum of social categories or the entirety of economic, social and political dynamics within the steppes, but rather to investigate the agents and practices of society directly engaged in the formation, management, and assurance of the polity.

Spatial boundaries, like chronological ones, are most often quite fluid and can be difficult to identify, especially in the archaeological record (Rodseth and Parker 2005). In order to analyze the steppe polity of the Iron Age, we must also consider the boundaries it exhibits. An attempt to determine the exact territorial extent of this political entity would be to assume that all boundaries related to the state culminate at a single border frontier with checkpoints. Since I seek to understand the nature of power politics within the Xiongnu empire, I will turn to the delineation of an élite culture which may be linked to the state. This spatial spread of such a material culture group may not equate to the full extent of the imperial realm, yet it might equate to the extent of the imperial aristocracy and those who participated in the networks of the imperial élite.

Those who were in positions of social and political power stood to gain, or lose, the most in the material and ritual expressions of authority. Thus, burials which fall into

¹⁰⁰ Research for the purpose of reconstructing the full range of social hierarchies would require a broad spectrum of material. Nikolai Kradin and others (2004) attempted such a study utilizing the burial ground of simple graves at Ivolga, the numerous stone circle and unmarked graves at Derestuy and other sites in Buryatia, and the large cemetery at Il'movaya pad'.

the broad category of élite and retain material manifestations of the display and demonstration of such social and political power are those which will help to identify and understand the ruling bodies of the state. Furthermore, the investiture in expressions which would not only reaffirm authority but also create a *supra-local* identity could very well signal the creation or perpetuation of a polity. We are fortunate to have such rich evidence of the various levels of the steppe élite represented in their burials, and I will use this evidence to reconstruct the material traditions and social rituals in which the élite participated in order to negotiate networks of power and confirm their status within them.

I take the monumental tombs as the primary indicators of the uppermost echelon of the steppe élite and the substantial cemeteries of circular graves as the broad assembly of the local groups who held considerable power. The circular graves represent those who had long possessed shared traditions in ritual customs for the interment and remembrance of their deceased, and chose to engage in these rituals and adhere to these traditions in order to remain within the social and cultural spheres which could ensure the most strength and security. The handful of mounded tomb cemeteries most likely relates to aggregates of supra-élites at centers of control. The monumental tombs and the complex rituals associated with them would have stood as prominent means of expressing authority. The mapping of these two kinds of sites provides an idea of the spatial extent of the polity, but the question of its limits must be tested. The identification of what is substantially different in material and ritual traditions aids us in delineating that which does or does not correlate to the polity in the archaeological record [Fig.6.64].

As the imperial state expanded and contracted, its frontiers not only shifted position but also changed in character. Economic, social and political networks were

certainly (re)negotiated in these instances. Taking as the focus of this study the two centuries during which the monumental tombs appeared, I will examine the areas of culture contact and the different ways in which the polity managed its borders. A high degree of interaction and cultural exchange occurred along the eastern edge of the Mongolian steppes, and to some degree also along the frontier with the so-called Western Regions of present-day Gansu and Xinjinag. The frontier along the Great Wall area, on the other hand, seemed to fluctuate greatly with intense efforts during this later period to define control. On the far western and northwestern fronts of the Mongolian steppes, there appears to have been a sudden push into new regions and attempts to make territorial claims associated with the empire. These examples will show how the means of political expression and power negotiation used within the polity were also manifested outward. Exterior relationships are critical to understanding the steppe empire, as I will show, in the formation of an imperial material culture which drew on steppe traditions from within as well as material expressions from without.

The Northeastern Frontier

During the third to second centuries BC, the northeastern most regions of present-day China had a burial tradition very different from the Mongolian steppes. The sites of Wangong 完工 (Nei Menggu 1965b) and Sanjiazi 三家子 (Heilongjiang and Qiqiha'er 1988) had sizeable burial pits with numerous individuals (as many twenty-six) all lain closely together along with their burial goods [Fig.6.65a]. Large numbers of animal heads – horses, cattle, dogs – were placed in the burials, and stone and bone arrowheads along

with small ornaments such as bronze bells and open work clasps comprised the majority of their personal trappings. The ceramic traditions were also quite different, consisting of round belly, straight necked pots with side loop handles as well as several imports or influences from the Chinese Central Plains (the typical bulbous legged *li* vessel). The far distance from Wangong to Sanjiazi, over the Daxing'an Mountains appears to tie the former site into a tradition of hunters and pastoralists of the greater Manchurian region.

By the first century BC, the burial traditions of the area near the Mongolian steppes had drastically changed, adopting customs of single burials in small coffins oriented north, bronze footed cauldrons, and a preponderance of wide-mouth pots [Fig.6.65b]. This trend toward similarities with the Mongolian steppes can be seen in the sites of Zhalainuo'er 扎賚諾爾 (Chen and Bai 1994; Nei Menggu yanjiusuo 1994), Labudalin 拉佈達林 (Nei Menggu et al. 1994), Yihewula 伊和烏拉 (Wei 2004: 216-219), and Qika 七卡 (Hulun and E'erguna 1997).¹⁰¹ Ding (2008:18) warns against the overly broad summaries of Iron Age cultures in this area (Wei 2004) which do not give close enough attention to particularities in the material. For the purposes of this study, I shall more closely investigate and test the nature of those elements which may seem to be equivalent to the customs in the Mongolian steppes. The coffins are long, rectangular, and constructed by joining the four sides at corner posts. This method was used for both wood plank coffins and ones made from birch bark. This is a small difference of craftsmanship from those in the Mongolian steppes, but an important distinction when

¹⁰¹ These sites are dated to from the 1st c.BC to 1st c.AD by the presence of *daquan wushi* 大泉五十 coins of the Wang Mang interregnum period (9-23 AD) and bronze mirrors similar to those described above.

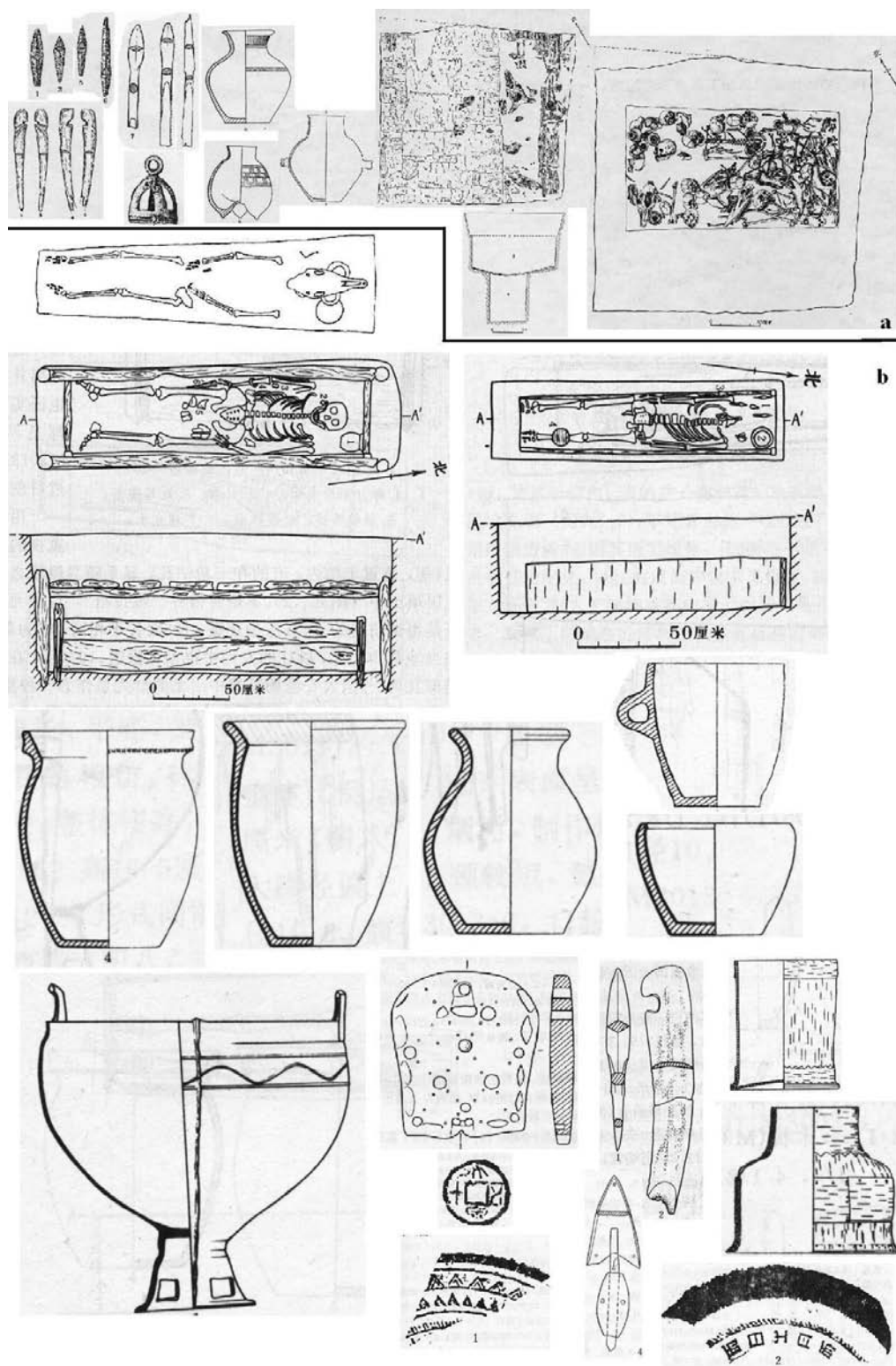


Fig.6.65 Northeast Frontier: (a) Wangong (Nei Menggu 1965b); (b) Qika (Hulun and E'erguna 1997), Zhalaينو'er (Chen and Bai 1994; Nei Menggu yanjiusuo 1994) and Labudalin (Nei Menggu et al. 1994)

viewed with coffins in the far western periphery which do retain the same type of coffin construction. The higher use of birch-bark for coffins, containers, and vessels is much greater than the appearance of birch-bark simply for boxes found within circular graves. The arrowheads seem to be of a different style manufacture, and the numerous wide-mouth jars have a different form of lip. The abundance of cups and flat bottomed, narrow necked pots made from birch-bark further set apart the vessel assemblage from those of the circular graves. Though the burials to the northeast of the Mongolian steppes exhibit undeniable similarities in burial customs and burial goods assemblages, we may attribute these more to high degrees of interaction and culture contact between these two regions than to an attribution of these sites to the same cultural phenomenon as that in the core area of circular graves.

The Southern Frontier with the Central Plains

Even the most recent studies that consider the Iron Age groups along the Chinese frontier (Wu En 2009; Pan 2007; Du 2007) seek to address the limits of the northern cultural phenomenon by searching for and outlining sites which bear indications of customs that would link them to steppe groups. The deductions about degrees of similarities or connections to those sites further north, while plausible, do not consider the full context of those sites equated to, or linked to cultural influences from, the steppes. The presence of cemeteries which are undoubtedly part of the Chinese tradition, and the fluctuation in their size, number and distribution, convey important factors in our understanding of this frontier and its relationship with groups further north.

A large number of unequivocally Chinese style interments appeared along the frontier in the middle Western Han Dynasty and lasted without much change until the early Eastern Han Dynasty (i.e. 2nd c.BC to 1st c.AD) (Wei 1998). These came about a hundred years after the waning of elaborate burials such as those at Taohongbala and Aluchaideng (see above). A long ramp led down to the floor of the tomb chamber, wherein was constructed a rectangular room that contained a pair of wood plank coffins at the rear. The tombs began with entirely wood construction [Fig.6.66d] and, through the use of ceramic tiles and roof pieces to pack the outside of the wood structure [Fig.6.66b], developed into entirely brick chambers by the early Eastern Han [Fig.6.66a]. The burial goods, placed at the front of the room, were predominantly of Chinese style and manufacture – *hu* pots and *ding* cauldrons, sometimes with three- or four-petal designs on the lids; ceramic models of wells, stoves and grain stores; lamps and incense burners; lacquer trays, bowls, cups and basins; and unbroken bronze mirrors. Bronze monster face door knockers, equivalent to the ring handles on the *hu* pots, were placed on the tombs entryways, and gilded bronze quatrefoil ornaments would occasionally be added. The only vessels which bore any resemblance to functions of the steppe ceramics were the rotund belly, narrow neck pots, and the horse bridle cheek pieces found in some of the tombs were of a flanged style not seen further north.

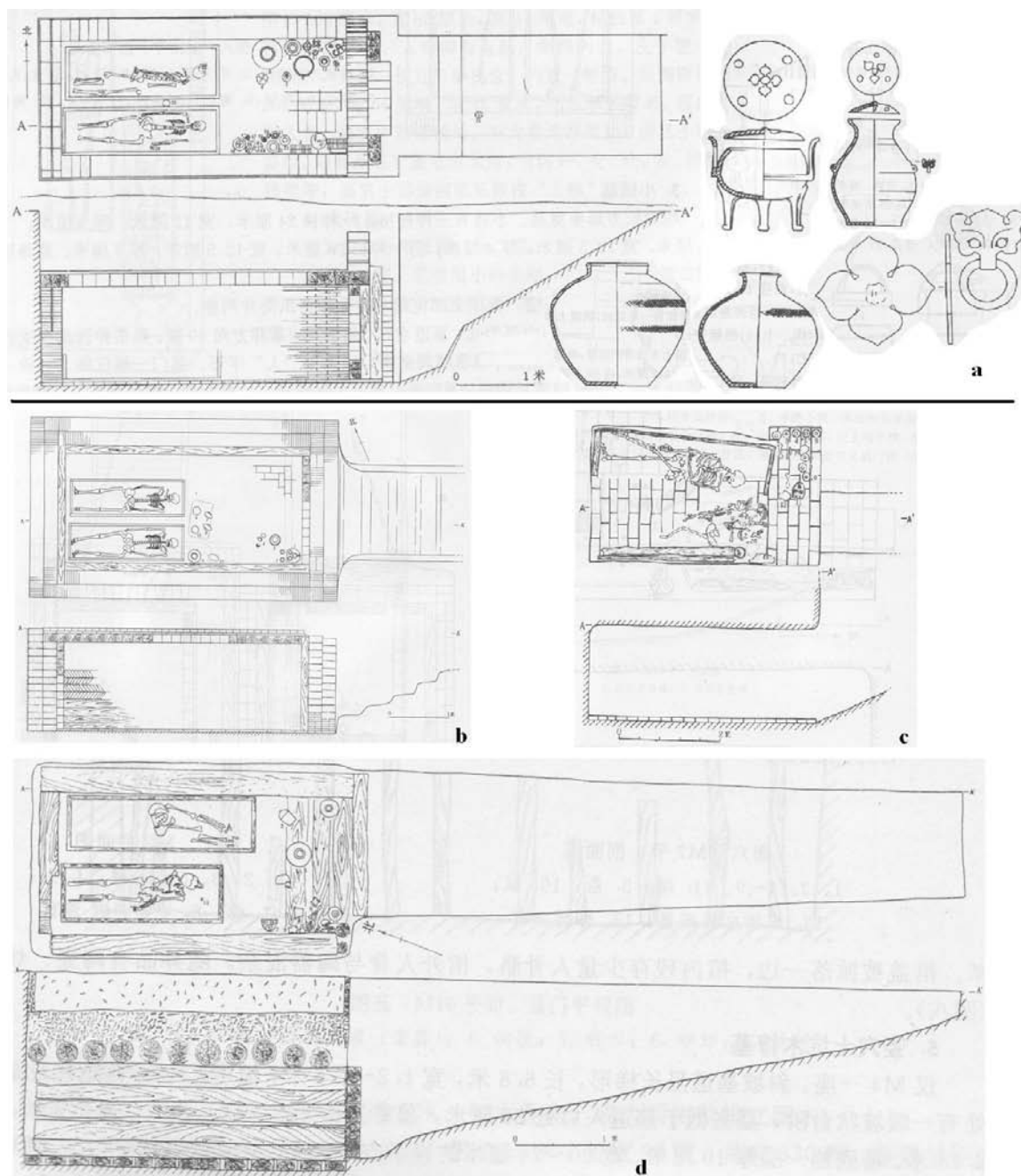


Fig.6.66 Chinese Tombs in the South Frontier: (a) Narin tolgoi, Bayan nuur; (b) Sajin tolgoi, Bayan nuur; (c) Sanduandi, Ordos; (d) Xindi, Ordos (Wei 1998: 15,21,23,25,37; 76; 142,152; 184)

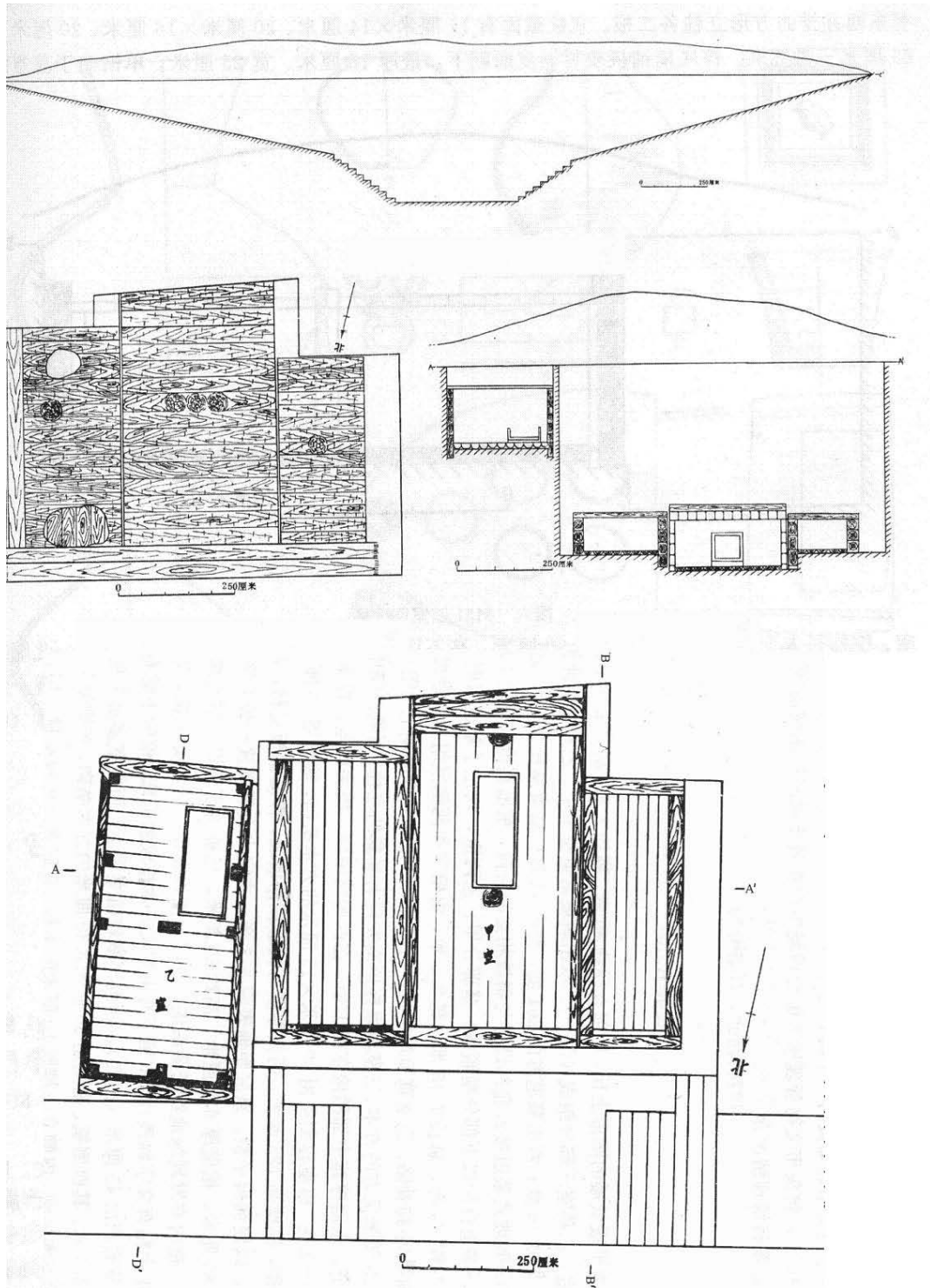


Fig.6.67 Zhaowan tomb 51, Baotou (Wei 1998: 204-205)

The only tomb which appears to deviate from this type was a mounded tomb at Zhaowan 召灣 cemetery in Baotou 包頭 just north of the upper bend of the Yellow River, placed amongst numerous burials akin to the other Chinese interments along the frontier (Wei 1998: 203-214) [Fig.6.67]. This multi-chambered double ramped tomb seemed to draw on many of the same traditions – mounds overtop, entryways leading to the bottom level of the burial, and rectangular wood chambers with columns – and the burial goods within were consistently Chinese. Though a second interment appears under the mound in a raised adjacent chamber, the burial was centered around one person. The unusual form and size of this monumental tomb in the Chinese frontier undoubtedly related to a person of rare and high status.

In the graves of northern China during the early and middle Western Han periods, we see connections to peoples as far north as Buryatia. A belt with the same components as those seen in Derestuy cemetery – bronze open-work square plaque and open work ring – was found at the site of Keshengzhuang 客省庄 in the region of the ancient Han imperial capital of Xi'an (Zhongguo kaogusuo 1962) [Figs.6.68a,35g]. The bronze open-work plaque with a wolf motif found at Xichagou 西岔溝, Liaoning (Sun 1960), far southeast from the Mongolian steppes, is an exact copy of a bronze plaque in Derestuy [Figs.6.68b,35a]. It is thus clear that this manner of belt ornamentation was not only a widespread style in the 2nd and 1st centuries BC, but the objects themselves were being produced on such a scale as to be distributed broad distances. Sun (1960) proposes that since the site of Xichagou exhibits distinct ceramic traditions particular to that region of

the northeast, those buried here may have been local inhabitants who held some characteristics in common with the mobile societies of the steppes. Whatever the implications of this presence of steppe belt ornaments so far from the main zone of the frontier, we must be reminded of the great distances which luxury goods traveled and not necessarily assume their presence in far-flung sites indicates the presence of certain peoples.

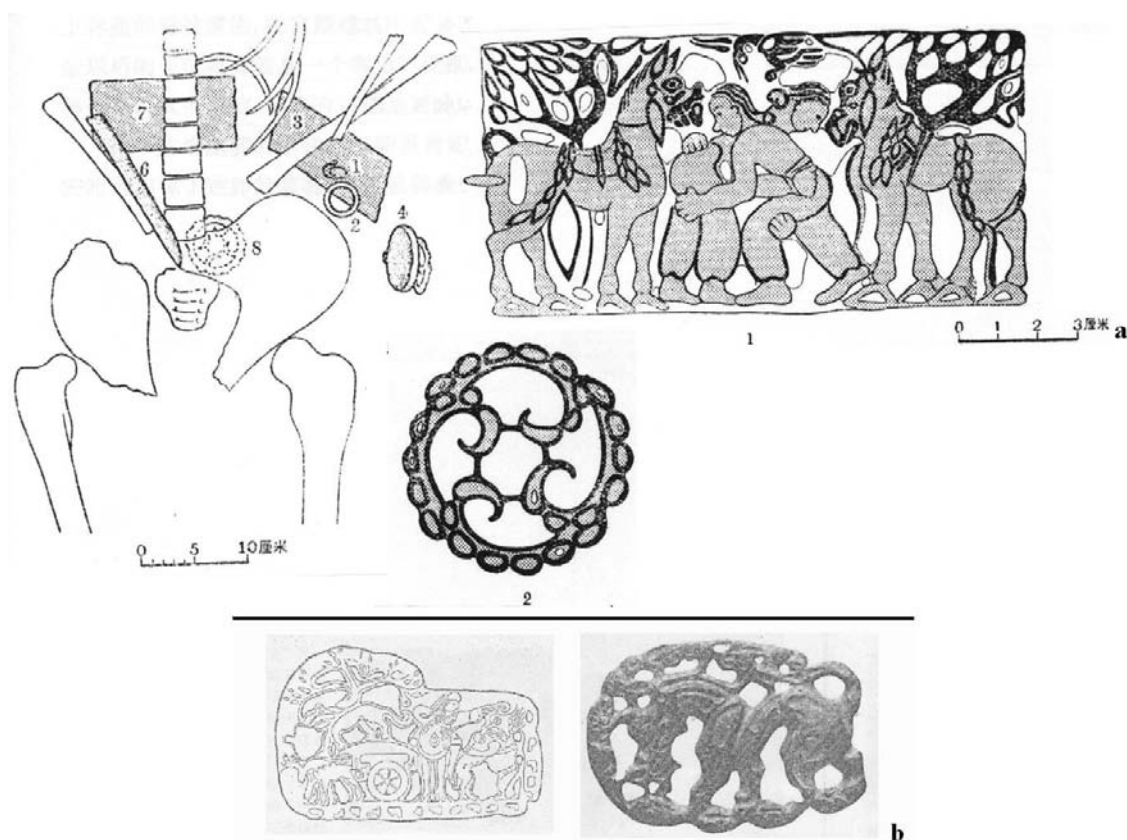


Fig.6.68 Belt plaques from Keshengzhuang grave 140, Shaanxi (*Zhongguo kaogusuo* 1962: 139) and Xichagaou, Liaoning (Sun 1960: 30,33)

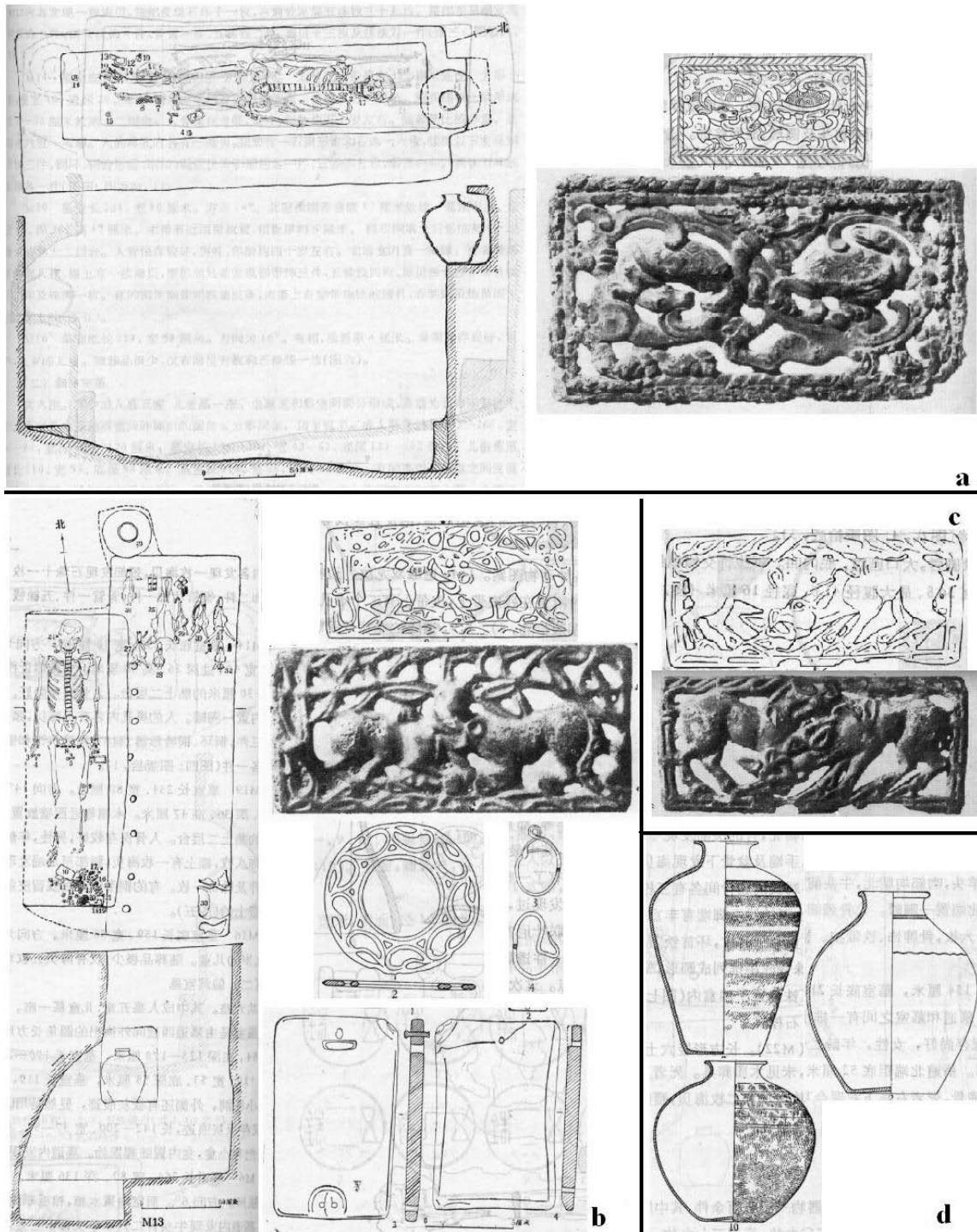


Fig.6.69 Daodunzi graves (a) DDZ-14; (b) DDZ-13; (c) DDZ-6 plaque; (d) ceramics (Ningxia wenwu et al. 1998: figs.4,vi; 7,9,10,14,vii; 9,vii; 8)

The site of Daodunzi 倒墩子 (Ningxia wenwu et al. 1998) at the southern edge of the Chinese frontier, and dated roughly to the late 2nd to early 1st c.BC, has been equated

to the northern steppe groups (Pan 2007: 135-138). However, a closer examination of the material reveals notable differences in the mortuary customs. The taller narrow neck pots are slightly different in style, and the rotund belly pots are not prevalent in the steppes [Fig.6.69d]. The deceased are interred in supine position within northern oriented wood coffins, but dissimilarities from customs further north can be seen in the shape of the grave pits. The shaft pits have a raised niche for the placement of vessels, and a number of the pits were carved with a lower side chamber for the coffin [Fig.6.69a,b]. Belt ornamentations, on the other hand, not only match those seen further north, but in many cases are exact copies of them, perhaps even produced further north. The bronze open-work plaques with animal combat scenes of Daodunzi 13 match exactly those of Derestuy 108 [Figs.6.69b,32c], as do the plaques in Daodunzi 6 and Derestuy 102 [Figs.6.69c,32b]. Other plaques, like the dragon and turtle plaque in burial 14 [Fig.6.69a], appear to have been made in this area under the influences of Chinese styles of manufacture or decorative choices. The differences in the styles of burial pits and ceramics do not disqualify an overall similarity in form and function to those burials further north, and the equivalency of not only elements but entire sets of belt ornamentation suggest very close ties with the inhabitants of the steppes. Again, the issue is not so much a determination of ethnic ties or the migration of peoples as the discernment of degrees of homogeneity in burial customs which might relate to political integration. The similarities between Daodunzi and Derestuy are numerous, but not as many as those seen in the burial customs and grave goods of the circular graves within the Mongolian steppes.

The site of Budonggou 補洞溝 (Tian and Guo 1986), closer to the north bend of the Yellow River, also shows connections with the northern steppe peoples in the ceramic wide-mouth and narrow-neck pots, bronze flat-bottom cauldron, and trefoil iron arrowheads [Fig.6.70]. The addition of a Chinese bronze *ding* cauldron and flat and triangular iron arrowheads hint toward a mixing of cultural and technological traditions. This may better characterize the larger portion of the remains in this region beginning in the 1st c.AD. The burials at Lijiataozi 李家套子 (Ningxia and Tongxin 1988) are vaulted chamber, ramped entry tombs but contain some ornaments and ceramics clearly of northern steppe origin [Fig.6.71]. The famous tomb 4 at Xigoupan 西溝畔 (Yikezhaomeng and Nei Menggu 1980a) yielded an ornate headdress and accompanying ornaments of gold and jade which exhibit traits of traditions to the north and the south of this zone of interaction (Pan 2004a) [Fig.6.72]. Open-work jade ornaments of Chinese style and manufacture are balanced with gold horse attachments like those found in the mounded tomb 54 at Il'movaya pad' (Konovalov 2008,1976), earrings whose emblems echo the reindeer of tapestries seen at Noyon uul (Rudenko 1962), and a crown with gold quatrefoils in the same shape as those found decorating the élite coffins of the steppes.

This admixture seems to have led to a dominance of Chinese styles in the 2nd c.AD, when the vaulted and multi-roomed brick tombs which had become widespread in the Central Plains by the late 1st c.BC stretched into the region of the Great Wall. The tomb form and contents were by and large Chinese style, but the inclusions of some steppe style ceramics and thematic scenes of mobile life and hunting decorating the doors and walls recall nomadic attributions proposed for the Chinese style tombs of the 1st c.BC

to 1st c.AD (Du 2007:79-80). Whether the occupants of these tombs were of steppe heritage or resettled from the Central Plains, they were clearly not full participants of the cultural traditions in the northern steppes at that time. The clear connections which had occurred during the 2nd and early 1st c.BC in the expressions of status, forms of burial assemblages, and mortuary customs became overshadowed and eventually replaced by the new burial traditions from the south.

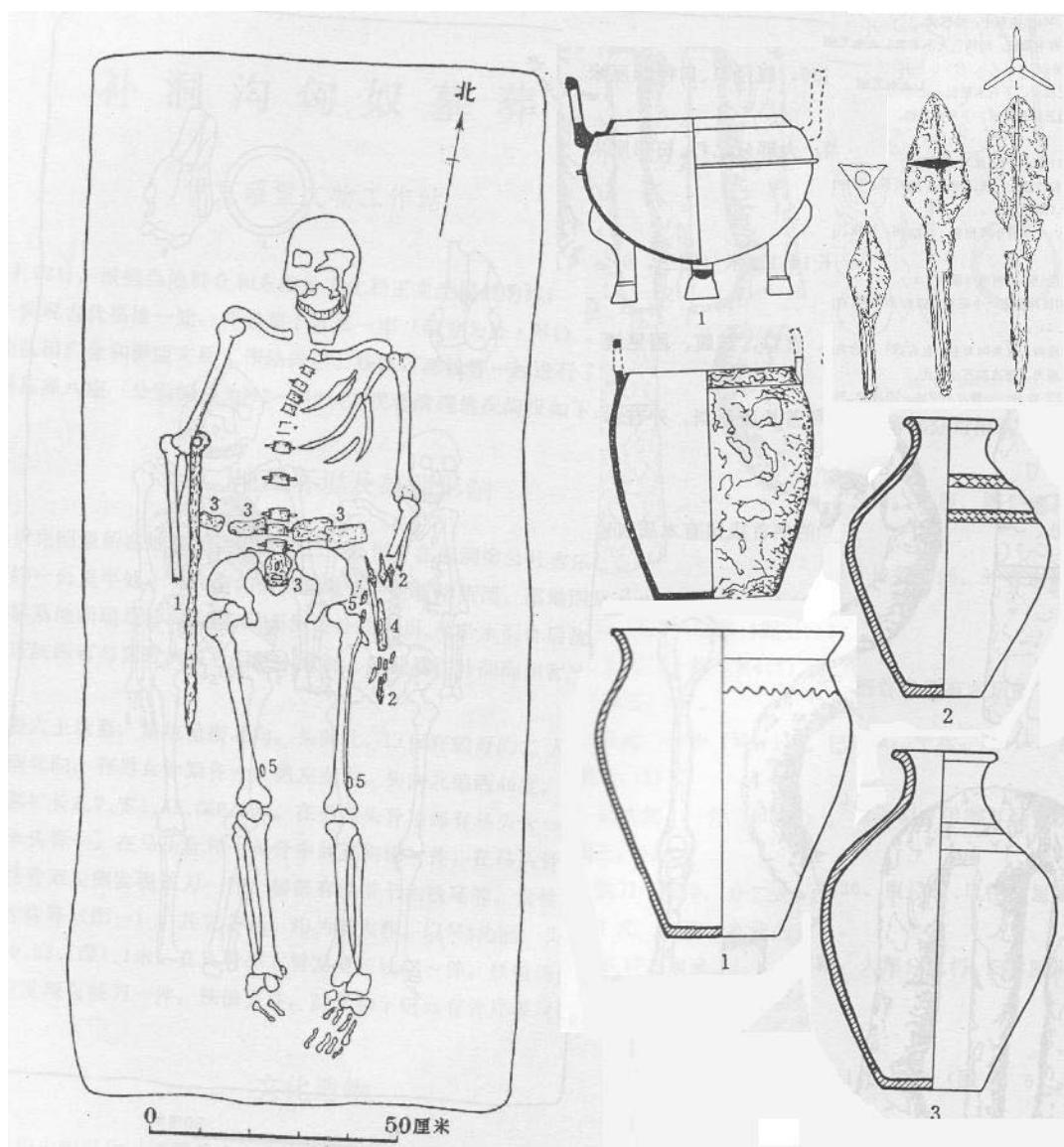


Fig.6.70 Budonggou, Inner Mongolia (Tian and Guo 1986: 396,397,400)

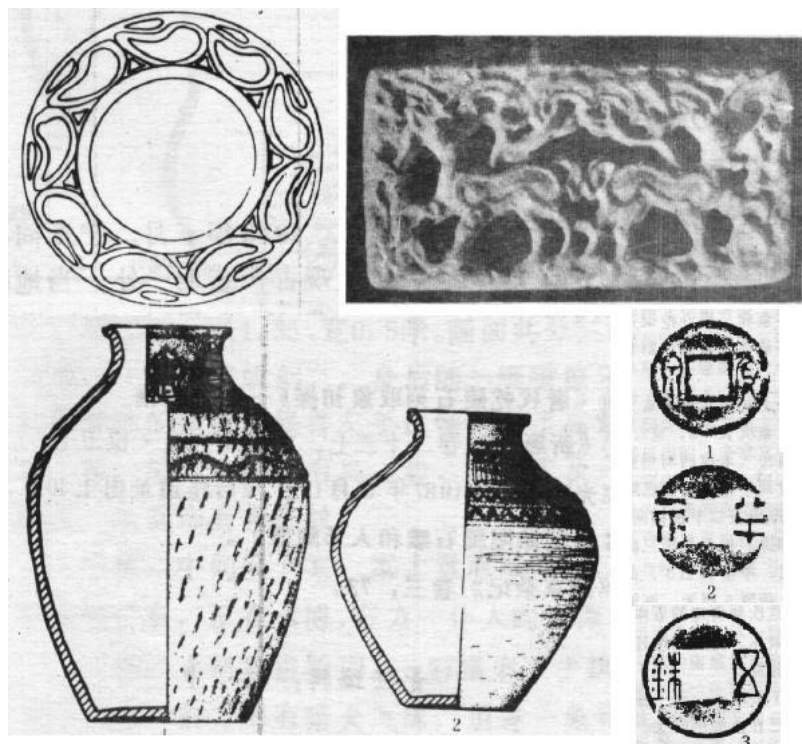


Fig.6.71 Lijiataozi, Ningxia (Ningxia and Tongxin 1988: 18-19)

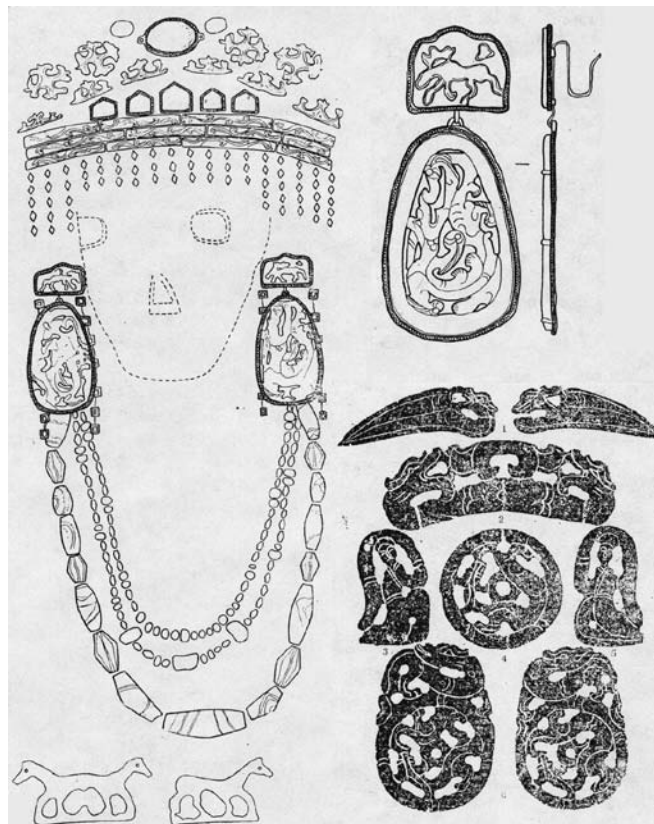


Fig.6.72 Xigoupan tomb 4, Inner Mongolia (Yikezhaomeng and Nei Menggu 1980a)

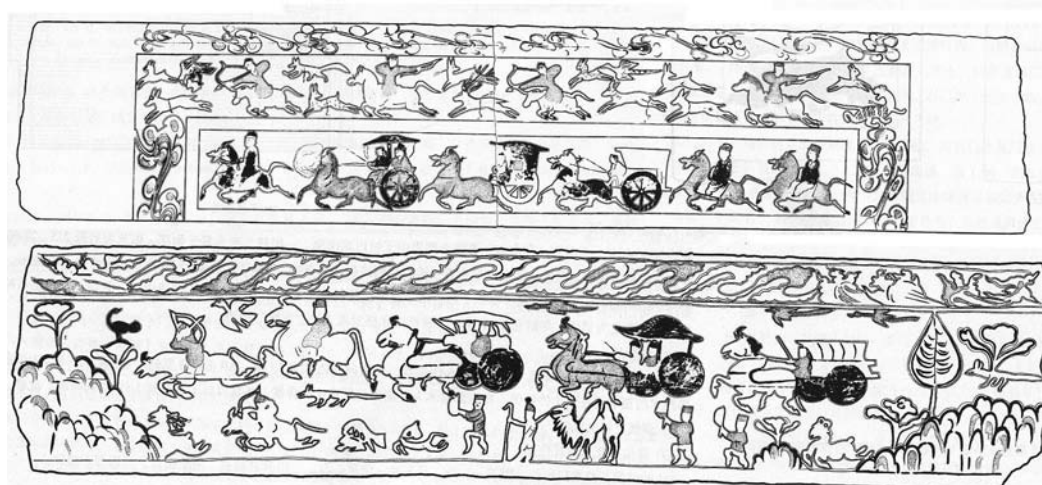


Fig.6.73 Stone tomb entryway, Dabaodang, Shaanxi (Shaanxi and Yulin 2001: figs.38,52)

The Southwestern Frontier

In this section I revisit the stone kurgan burials of far western Xinjiang in the Yili Valley and the remains of a culture there which stretched into southeastern Kazakhstan, considering the remains nearest to the Mongolian steppes. A handful of recent excavations and surveys have renewed interest in these groups of the western regions, and confirmed the long period of occupation. The round stone mounds and round belly pots appeared as early as the middle first millennium BC (Xinjiang and Tekesi 2006) [see also Figs.6.18-20] and appear to continue up through the Han dynasty – as evidenced by the *wuzhu* 五銖 coins (Xinjiang and Xibei Daxue 2005) – and extend up until the 3rd to 4th c.AD (Xinjiang 2006). Though this group appears distant from the western most area of remains related to the circular graves and square tombs of the Mongolian steppes, their long duration merits attention. Sites such as Wusu (Xinjiang yanjiusuo 1996) reach past the Tianshan Mountains into the southern edge of the Dzungar Basin and make us question the territorial limits of this group. Beyond a sharing of certain artistic motifs,

such as horses and animal combat involving mythical creatures [Fig.6.18], there appear no similarities in grave structure or vessel traditions to the peoples of the Mongolian steppes.

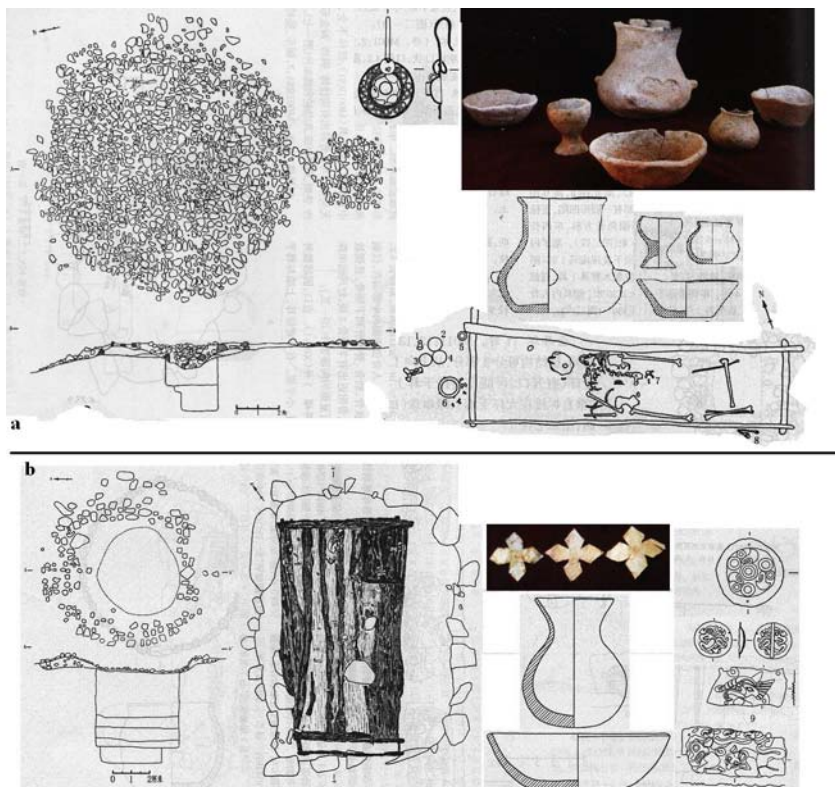


Fig. 6.74 Dongheigou burials 1 and 12 (Xinjiang and Xibei Daxue 2007: figs.16-21,28-32; pl.2)

Some degree of similarity can be seen with the Dongheigou 東黑溝 site under recent excavation in the Hami area near the modern Mongolian border with Xinjiang (Xinjiang and Xibei Daxue 2007). Stone mounds with pits in the center, deposits of entire horses, and a small collection of gold jewelry resonate with the traditions of the kurgans further west [Fig.6.74]. The wood coffins differentiate these graves from the western kurgans, and the collection of ceramic vessels resembles neither their western or northeastern neighbors. The most intriguing findings associated with grave furnishing

were the scraps of strips and four petal emblems of gold scattered across the remnants of the wood chamber in grave 12 of Dongheigou [Fig.6.74b]. These bear a striking resemblance to the pieces of lattice work and quatrefoil decoration found on the élite coffins of the circular graves and square tombs further north.

While the assembly of other material elements and customs show a clear difference in mortuary tradition with the Mongolian steppes, it does show at least a degree of interaction with the élite interred in such decorative furnishings. The lack of any sites so far which tie the Gansu corridor or Xinjiang directly to the Mongolian steppes is a noteworthy discrepancy when compared to the previously discussed frontier with China. A dearth of archaeological investigations in, and hence poor understanding of, the core of the Dzungar Basin leaves open a multitude of questions for this crucial region between the Mongolian steppes and the trade routes and oasis states of Xinjiang. A fluid frontier similar to the Great Wall region may perhaps exist between the northern steppe groups and those in the Tianshan mountains, Yili valley and oasis states, but the available material does not allow us to address fully the nature of this periphery. It is the goal of present excavations in the Mongolian Altai (Miller et al.2008) to begin to answer such questions.

The Northwestern Frontier

Sites in far northwest Mongolia and Tuva present a more dynamic frontier – one which exhibits two powerful groups abutting in the presence of very distinct mortuary traditions and the parallel erection of large mounded tombs. The middle region of the Yenesei River, just north of Tuva – or the Minusinsk Basin – was the center of a mobile

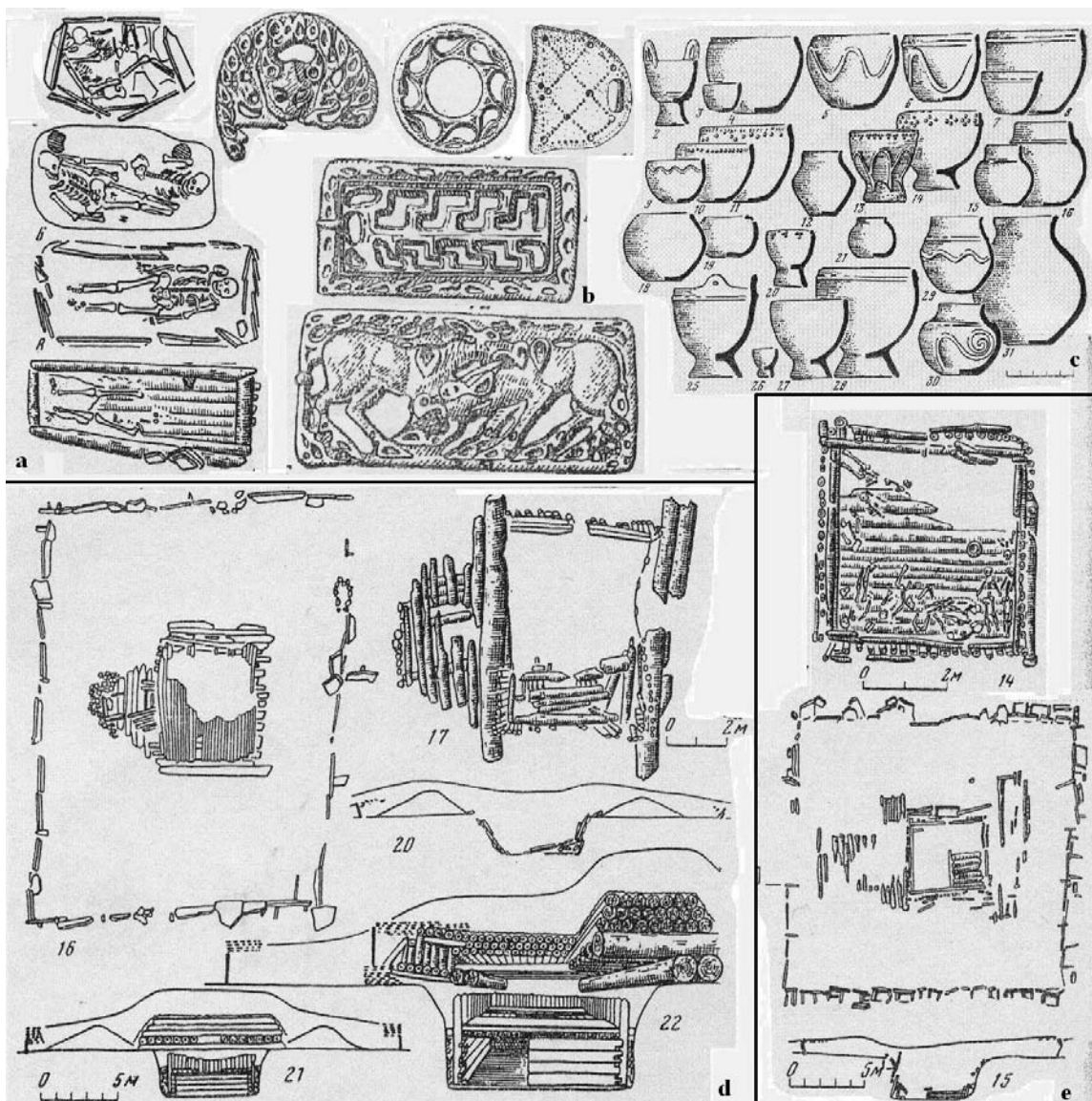


Fig.6.75 Tesinski Culture, Minusinsk Basin (Moshkova 1992:442-445): (a) wood log and stone slab graves; (b) bronze and stone belt ornaments; (c) ceramic storage, serving and cook pots; (d) Razlyv III kurgan; (e) Tepsei XVI kurgan

pastoral culture labeled by archaeologists as the Tagar (Zubkov 2003; Moshkova 1992: 206-224). Its large earthen mounds contained as many as a hundred individuals within the underlying large wooden chambers, and these were complimented by smaller stone cist burials. All these features relate closely to the traditions of large log chamber tombs with multiple individuals seen in the late Bronze Age sites in Tuva and northwestern Mongolia

[Figs.3.11-13]. In the third century BC, when the Pazyryk culture seemed to dissipate, the burial traditions stemming from the Minusinsk basin led into the period labeled the Tes culture of the 2nd c.BC to 1st c.AD (Moshkova 1992: 224-235) [Fig.6.75]. These archaeological cultures appear to greatly overlap and may perhaps be considered as phases of a similar cultural tradition.¹⁰²

To begin with, the smaller graves consisted of simple stone-lined grave pits with several flexed inhumations or a single supine individual. The wood coffins were constructed from hewn logs and resembled the single burials in stone cists in orientation and placement of the body [Fig.6.75a]. These small burials resembled both the stone lined burials of the middle first millennium BC in Tuva [Figs.6.7,9] and the smaller of the wood coffins within the realm of the Pazyryk culture. The custom of burying numerous individuals in large log chambers, seen at the sites of Chandman, Suglug-khem and Khayrakan (Semenov 2003; Novgorodova et al.1982), persisted into the mounded tombs of the Tes culture [Fig.6.75d,e]. Large earthen mounds surrounded by square retaining walls contained complex log chambers. Adjoining this chamber was trapezoidal approach also constructed of logs. Both the chamber and the funerary entryway were placed either at the ground surface beneath the mound or just below the surface.

The vessel assemblages in this assortment of burials consisted of large bowls, jars, and footed-cook pots, all similar to the predominant vessels in the Mongolian steppes and

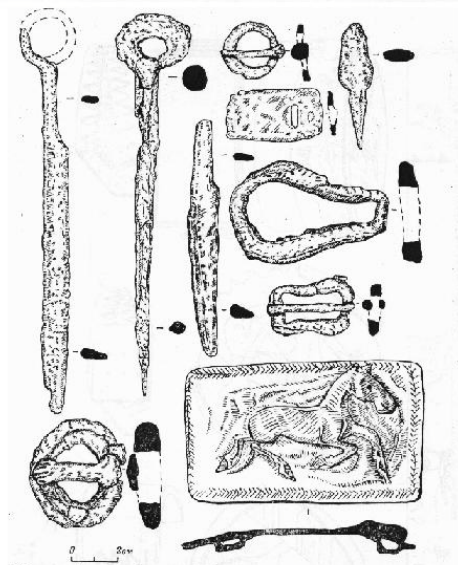
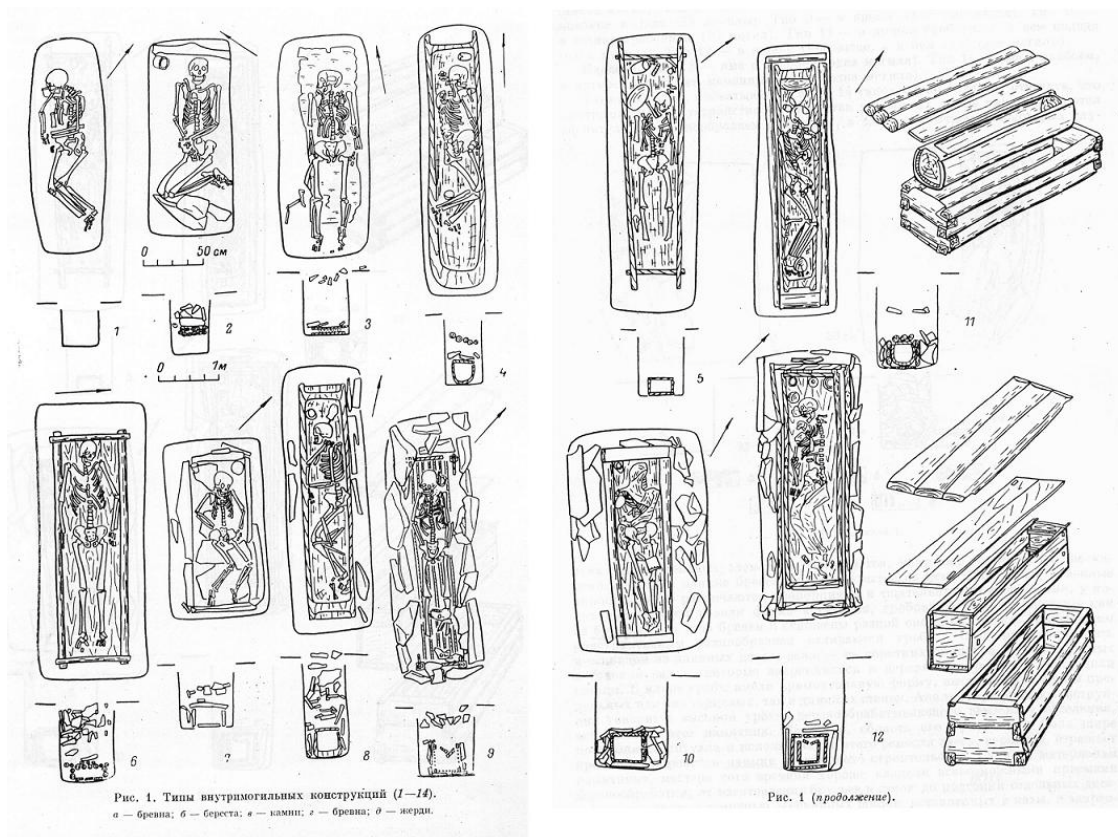
¹⁰² In fact, these divisions match exactly the divisions for Tuva and the appearance of the so-called Hunnu-Sarmation period, whose early phase has been assigned the dates of 2nd c.BC to 1st c.AD. These are perhaps too convenient in their match to the dates given in historical records for the span of the first steppe empire, reflecting an attempt to match them exactly to the life of the “Hunnic” empire rather than fully considering the periodic divisions provided by more serious attention to relative and chronological dating. I will instead rely on a broad relative chronology of the remains by relating, what materials can be, to the items in the Mongolian steppes, Buryatia and North China whose chronology is better understood and has been introduced above.

the associated steppe life ways, but quite different in style. The clearest connection between this area and their neighbors to the southeast can be seen in the personal ornaments. We find not only stone plates and bronze open-work plaques with similar craftsmanship and style, but also exact copies of ornaments seen across great distances elsewhere [Fig.6.75b]. A broken plaque found here bears resemblance to an hour-glass shaped plaque from Derestuy [Fig.6.33b], and a square plaque with entwined horses equates to plaques found at both Derestuy and Daodunzi [Figs.6.32b,69c]. Without the full context of these items it is difficult to determine if they were incorporated as full sets in the same manner as they were elsewhere or were simply luxury items that made their way into this area of South Siberia. Their presence nonetheless confirms some higher degree of interaction with, or participation in cultural traditions of, the areas to the east during the 2nd to 1st c.BC.

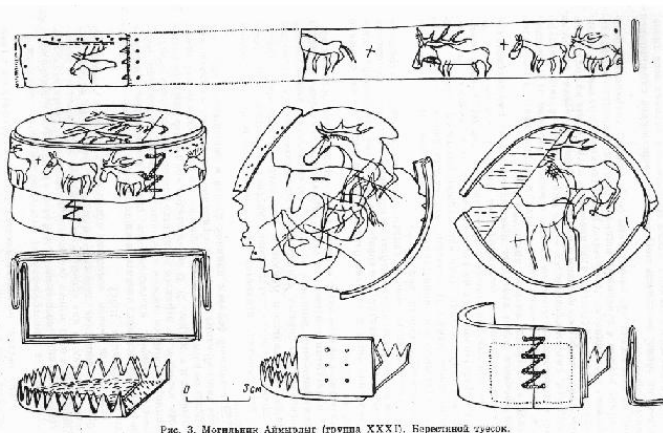
Directly down river from the mounded log chamber tombs of the Tes culture, the nearby cemetery of Aimyrlyg XXXI (Stambulnik 1983) included burial traditions that exhibit the presence of a new dominant culture in the region, along the exact stretch of the Yenesei River in Tuva where large wooden chambers of the so-called Chandman culture had been.¹⁰³ Over two hundred graves were found with small circular stone markings slightly larger than the shaft pits beneath them. From the descriptions of a variety of grave furnishings – wood coffins, stone cists and a familiar set and proportion of combinations thereof [Fig.6.76] – and assemblages of trefoil iron arrowheads, wide-

¹⁰³ Eileen Murphy (2003) provides some additional information on the site of Aimyrlyg XXXI from her research of several unpublished reports of this site in the archives of the Institute for the History of Material Culture in St.Petersburg.

mouth and narrow-neck pots, ring-handled iron knives, deposits of sheep and horse bones, and small precious metal ornaments and plaques, it is clear that Aimyrylg XXXI is a



2. Металлические изделия (группа XXXI). Солярный символ (серебро, бронза).



3. Могильник Аймырылг (группа XXXI). Нарежанный кусок.

Fig. 6.76 Aimyrylg XXXI graves, Tuva (Stambulnik 1983)

cemetery of circular graves exactly like those in the Mongolian steppes.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, the findings of fragments of “Far Eastern” (Chinese) mirrors dating to the first century BC or later (Stambulnik 1983: 38) provides a date which compliments the material of the circular grave phenomenon. A handful of stone ring marked wood coffin burials in the same manner of the circular graves were found in the vicinity of the site of Chandman (Novgorodova et. al. 1982), further evidencing the presence of circular graves in the region along the border of present-day northwestern Mongolia.

In addition to this clear presence of standard burials of the Mongolian steppes, there was also a cemetery at Bai-Dag II with large circular graves and monumental square mounded tombs (Mandelstam and Stambulnik 1992). The large square tombs, reaching lengths of up to 27 meters, had trapezoidal stone pathways at the southern sides leading up to the mound and contained complex wood grave furnishings decorated with long strips and four-petal ornaments of gold mounted with iron nails [Fig.6.77]. The structure and furnishing described for the mounded tombs of Bai-Dag II undoubtedly match them with the square tombs outlined above. The circular graves at this site range between 4-6 and 10-15 meters, seemingly echoing the divisions of circular grave size in the Mongolian steppes. These graves contained wood coffins, sometimes within stone cists, and some of them were decorated in the same manner as the furnishings of the larger tombs. The vessels here also match with the narrow-neck and wide-mouth pots with wave pattern décor around the neck or shoulders. The sum of remains at these sites unequivocally represents a spread of the groups from the Mongolian steppes, beginning

¹⁰⁴ The only significant difference in mortuary custom seems to be the treatment of the body. In a number of graves, the bodies are lain supine with their legs slightly bent. This position seems reminiscent of the bodies within the Chandman style log chambers and might be a remnant of the previous burial traditions.

in the 1st c.BC, into this northwestern frontier, expanding overtop previous cultures and pushing up against other powerful steppe groups. A "spread" of the mortuary traditions and material culture into this region, whether because of migration of peoples, colonization, or coopting of local groups into the polity, represents the inclusion of these regions directly into the system of elites who governed the steppe polity, or "imperialization" (Doyle 1986).

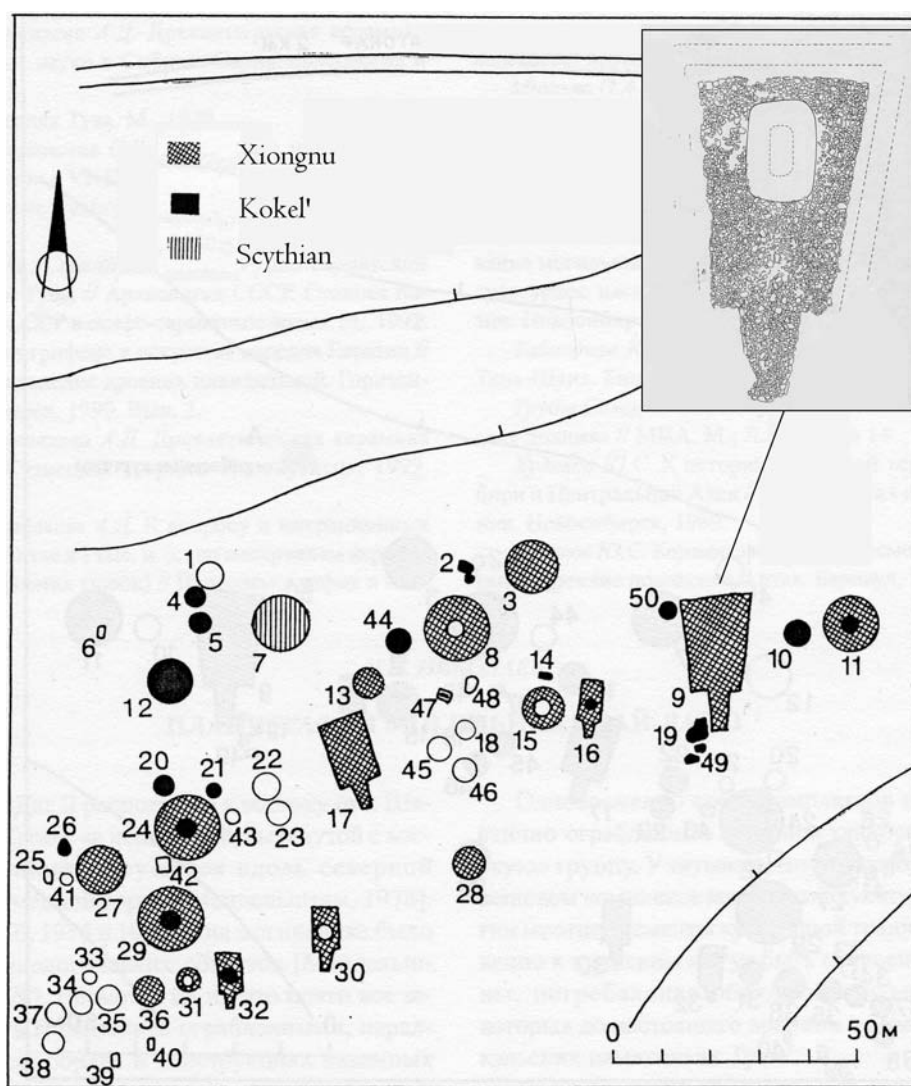


Fig.6.77 Baidag II cemetery, Tuva (after Nikolayev 2003: 262 and Moshkova 1992: 430)

Defining the Iron Age Entity of the Mongolian Steppes

Surrounded by and intermixed with diverse steppe groups of the late second to early first millennium BC that employed varying traditions of monumental theaters and prestigious goods, a new entity emerged in the 3rd to 2nd century BC identified by its new traditions in burial customs and expressions of wealth and status. A strong similarity in cultural traditions and material assemblages seems to have spread far during this time, from South Siberia to North China, though the traditions of luxury goods extended well beyond these regions. During the course of the 1st century BC, the burial traditions shifted to incorporate different styles and collections of wealth and more elaborate grave furnishings while still holding on to many of the same basic funerary customs. The number of stone ring marked burials increased drastically across the steppes and were suddenly accompanied by monumental, ostentatious tombs. The spread of these circular graves and square tombs shifted slightly, withdrawing from a presence in the Great Wall region, exhibiting a stronger influence on the groups of far northeast China and pushing strongly into the western peripheries, coming directly up against powerful groups of South Siberia and possibly Kazakhstan. The sudden appearance of the large tombs – though not without precedence centuries earlier in the Bronze Age monuments – was matched by their sudden disappearance after the 1st century AD, and the circular graves tapered off soon after in the 2nd century AD.

I have attempted to delineate a materially attested entity of significant impact on the archaeological record that may both evidence a dominant political entity and relate, generally in time and space, to the political entity documented in the historical records of the Chinese as the Xiongnu. In the following chapter, I will consider chronological shifts

in and analyze the material manifestations of the *means* by which the supra-rulers and local leaders expressed authority, defined social status, and negotiated the avenues of political power. The majority of archaeological remains considered thus far for this Iron Age political entity fall within the period of the 1st century BC to 1st century AD. This period also contains the greatest expressions of and contentions for political power within the arenas and accoutrements of the mortuary arena. The period of the Late Xiongnu (mid 1st century BC to late 1st century AD) corresponds closely to the materially delineated later period of fluorescence for the Iron Age steppe polity yet has received little attention from historians as a formidable phase. The following chapter will thus focus on the developments of this later period and the dynamics of power politics that may be inferred from the numerous lines of evidence.

Chapter Seven:

BURIALS OF THE STEPPE ÉLITE

Burials embody expressions of identity – individual, group, and overlapping identities, just as they are concurrently structured during life – through objects, places and practices of negotiating political power, culminating in constructed memories that serve to secure that power. In this chapter, I will discuss the changes that occurred in the funerary traditions of the Xiongnu realm during the first century BC and how the new traditions presented a more elaborate yet well-defined set of distinctions for the steppe polity. The resulting traditions concurrently served to integrate the steppe élite through a discernable assemblage of goods and styles within traditional steppe customs, and to distinguish a restricted status of the uppermost echelons of the élite in their contention for power, legitimacy and authority over various Inner Asian groups of the Xiongnu realm.

In referring to the upper levels of society, and the occupants of the majority of burials documented, I employ the term *élite*, rather than nobility or aristocracy, specifically for its flexibility and relatively permissive character (Wason 1994). This allows the discussion to oscillate within the broader spectrum of the social élite, even though there may have existed, within the broader sphere of the élite, those who retained restricted ranks of a steppe aristocracy. Élite burials of society often consist of those with the greatest amount of labor and goods invested (Härke 1990), as these elevated members of society were entangled in competitive struggles and utilized systems of value to create unequal relationships to their benefit (Lesure 1999). The question at hand, then, is how members of an aristocracy, or other distinct elevated and restricted groups, can be seen

within the upper levels of society, and how they related to and interacted with the remaining élites in their society and with the agents of the surrounding peer polities.

Steppe Society

Animal art ornamentation grew dramatically in Eastern Inner Asia over the course of the first millennium BC, culminating in intricate belt plaques by the fourth to second centuries BC, and was part of a pan-Eurasian phenomenon. However, the preponderance of particular motifs in disparate contexts and apparent regional trends should not be mistaken for markers of identifiable tribal groups. We must be careful of equating such personal ornaments, despite their emblematic appearance, necessarily with “lineage emblems” (cf. Davis 1985). Their fluid movement across eastern Inner Asia makes it improbable to define regional ethnic groups based simply on the distribution of animal art ornamentation, generally or through specific motifs. Rather than matching particular types of ornamentation or motifs to specific regional group affiliations, we may analyze the often formulaic use of such ornaments within burials (Williams 2006: 48). The assemblages of prestigious belt décor, including animal art ornamentation, represent a nucleus of steppe traditions that operated on a supra-local level of a common cultural vocabulary, and also at local levels of social interplay and power politics of those who possessed, restricted, or distributed these items.

A number of animal art plaques found in graves of the early first millennium BC along the frontier with China exhibit clear evidence of Chinese craftsmanship (including some Chinese inscriptions) and point to the manufacture of these prestige goods by

Chinese for steppe consumption (So and Bunker 1995: 53).¹⁰⁵ The occurrence of foreign, especially steppe-style, luxury items, motifs and styles had already made inroads into China during the Eastern Zhou expansive period of eighth to third centuries BC (So and Bunker 1995: 69), and by the second century BC, these animal art ornaments found their way not only into burials of the steppe élite but also into tombs of the Chinese élite in many areas of the Han Empire [Figs.7.1, 7.2] (Qiao 2004). Most of these exhibit Chinese styles of execution with steppe iconography, though some utilized Chinese symbolic vocabulary, like the intertwined dragons and turtles found in both steppe and Chinese tombs [Figs.7.71, 7.2]. This trend highlights both the difficulty of determining social, ethnic, or political identity based solely on prestige goods – especially without consideration of their contexts within burial goods assemblages –as well as the transference of foreign luxury items and styles across cultural and political boundaries as either copied or imported artifacts.

While this particular language of status expression expanded far across Eastern Inner Asia in the third and second centuries BC, the circular grave tradition which may be associated with these sets of open-work animal art belt ornamentation did not spread as far. The particular sets of open-work animal plaques and rings with stone plates or strings of beads have been found in burials of noticeably different mortuary customs [Figs.6.32, 6.67b, 6.70, 6.71, 6.77a, b]. Even some burial grounds like Daodunzi, which displayed consistent ceramics traditions and a common status goods assemblage, exhibited differing burial structures and funerary customs such as the placements of the body and the grave

¹⁰⁵ A Chinese artisan's tomb near Xi'an from the Qin period (3rd century BC) contained several molds for steppe style plaques, further attesting to the Chinese manufacture of steppe style luxury goods (Shaanxi 2006).

offerings (Ningxia wenwu et al. 1998). It is noteworthy that, unlike the burials within the Mongolian steppes, these ornamental sets were usually not placed on the body, rather beside the deceased or at their feet [Fig.6.69a, b]. If these were offerings of the living to the dead, rather than possessions of the deceased, then their presence would not be a direct reflection of the identity of the deceased in life but only their constructed collaborative identity in the process of burial.

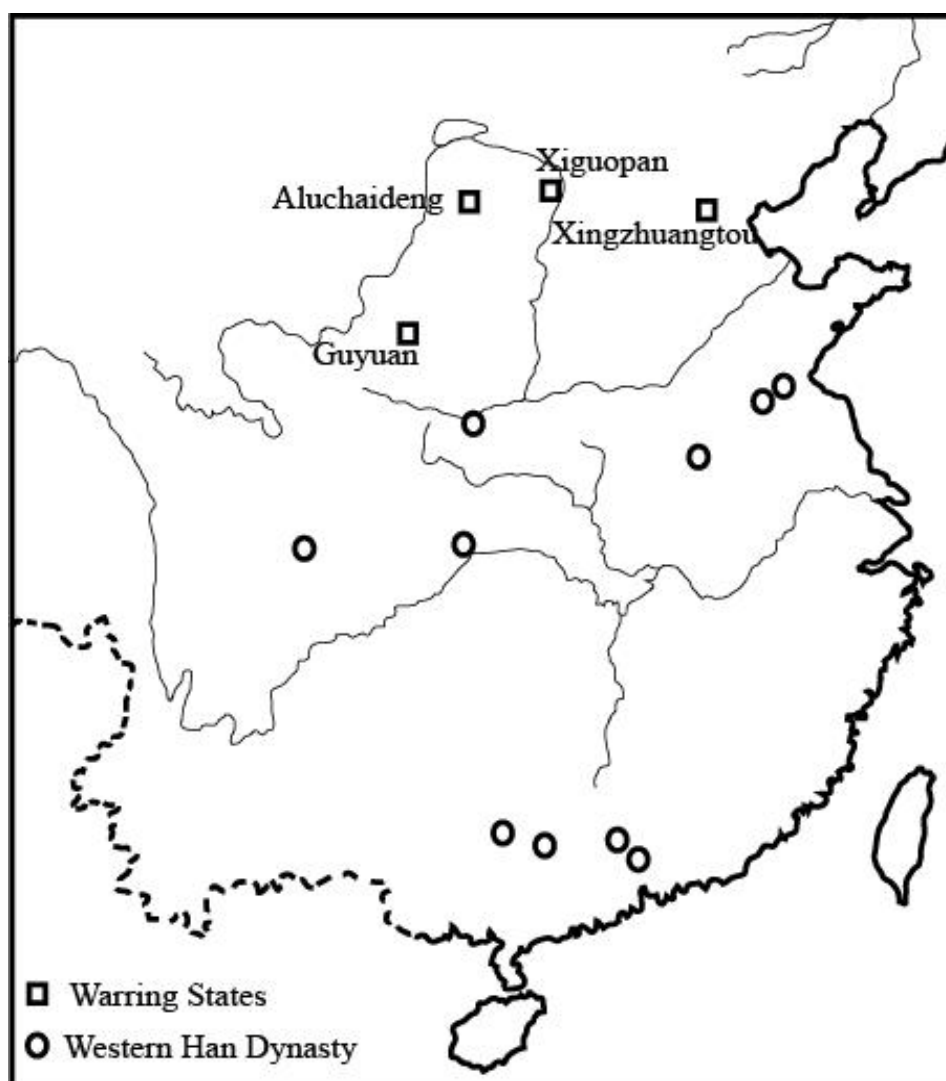


Fig. 7.1 Animal art plaques in China (after Lu and Dan 2007: 45)

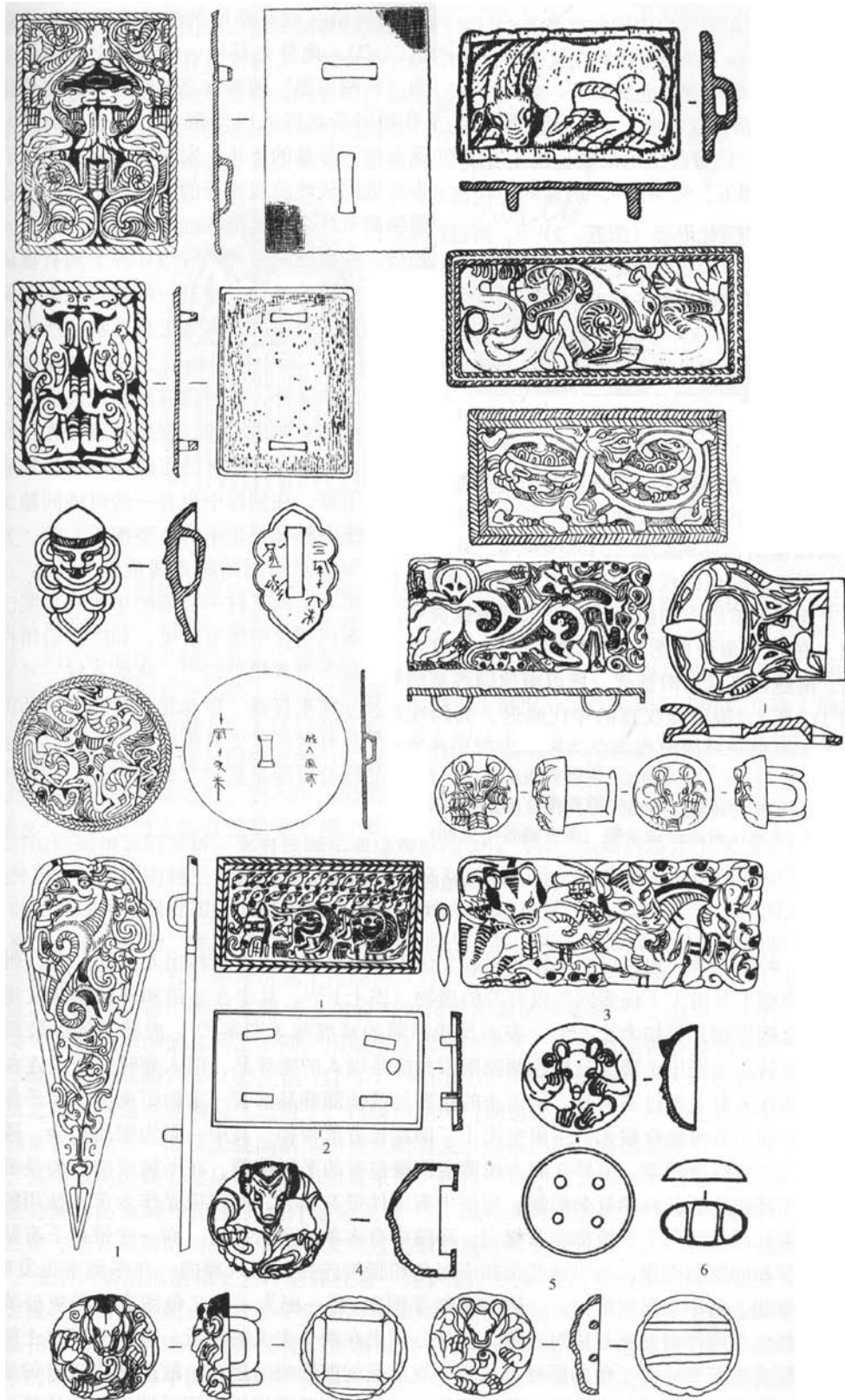


Fig. 7.2 Animal art ornaments in early Han Chinese tombs (after Qiao 2004)

Steppe Society Redefined

The dramatic increase in the number and spread of circular graves of the Mongolian steppes in the first century BC does not equate to a population increase, but an enlargement of the number of steppe élite burials, or rather an amplification of élite investment in funerary rites and mortuary monuments. The concurrent appearance of the large square tombs marks an additional significant intensification of élite funerary investments, one matched also by the drastic changes in burial goods toward more exotic elements of material assemblages.



Fig.7.3 inset gold earrings from (a) Tamirin ulaan hushuu tomb 109 (Khatanbaatar 2007: 167) and (b) Tevsh uul tomb 1 (Tseveendorj 1989: 86)

Exotic Prestige Goods

While certain, less prestigious items, such as beads and ceramics, continued without any apparent alterations, the standard prestige goods, namely the belt sets of cowry shells, stone geometric plates or metal belt plaques, and flat stone, iron, or open-work bronze rings, disappeared. In their stead, solid iron clasps [Fig.6.31:1, 2] became one of the more prominent belt ornaments, of which the more luxuriant ones were covered in gold foil [Fig.6.35d, e]. More important, however, was the extraordinary rise in foreign styles and goods which created an ostentatious assemblage of exotic and domestic prestige goods.

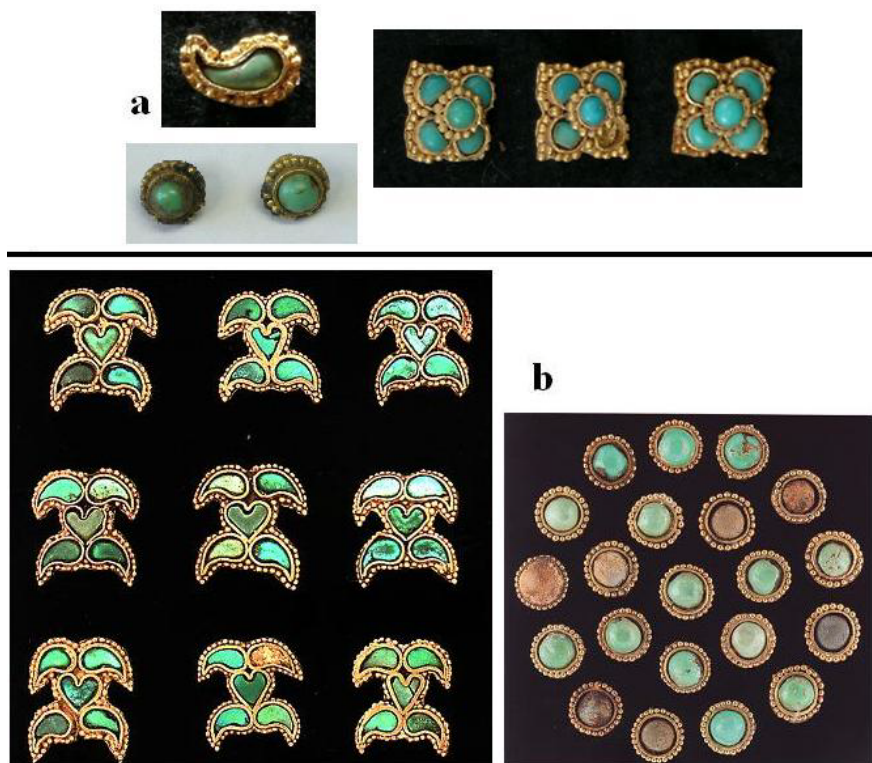


Fig.7.4 Gold inlaid jewelry from (a) Gol Mod tomb 20 (Brosseder 2007: 83-84) and (b) Tillya Tepe tombs I and III, Afghanistan (Hiebert and Cambon 2008: 239, 260)

Precious metal ornaments with inlaid stones had been present in élite graves of the late first millennium BC (So and Bunker 1995; Tian and Guo 1980a), and by the first century BC this manner of ornamentation increased in both personal and coffin ornamentation. Gold earrings with settings for stones, now lost, have been found at several sites (Khatanbaatar 2007; Navaan 1999; Tseveendorj 1989) [Fig.7.3], and small turquoise stones meant for insets have conversely been found (Miller et al. 2008). The most significant find of this manner of ornamentation points to a foreign source not only for the stones, but also, perhaps for the artifacts themselves. Small granulated gold ornaments with turquoise inlays found in tomb 20 at Gol Mod cemetery bear a striking resemblance to ornaments found at Tillya Tepe in Afghanistan, and were quite possibly



Fig. 7.5 Gilded iron monster mask buckle ornament with turquoise inlays (Minyaev and Sakharovskaya 2007b: 53)

manufactured there in Bactria (Brosseder 2007) [Fig.7.4].¹⁰⁶ The lavishly ornamented élite found interred at Tillya Tepe (dated to the first half of the first century AD) attest to powerful leaders in the area of ancient Bactria (Hiebert and Cambon 2008) at approximately the same time as those interred in the square tombs of Mongolia. The unlooted remains at Tillya Tepe further evidence the copious amount of intricate ornaments that would have adorned the garments of the Inner Asian élite in Bactria, and quite possibly the remains of some individuals interred in the Mongolian square tombs,

¹⁰⁶ Ancient Bactria has been equated to the region of the Da Xia 大夏, mentioned in Chinese texts as having long distance interactions with the Mongolian steppes as well as having been visited by the venturesome Chinese emissary Zhang Qian 張騫, who returned to the Han court with accounts of the distant polities along the Silk Road and further west (*Shiji* chapter 123). Bactria is also the region of the eventual Kushan Empire founded by the Yuezhi 月氏 tribes who had fled from the expansionary conquests of the Xiongnu a few centuries earlier.

by the presence of similar ornamentation, before the coffers of the deceased were looted. Monster mask buckle ornamentation found in the square tomb 7 at Tsaraam cemetery in Buryatia exhibits the inlay of precious stones into a gilded iron framework, as well as a motif, the exact manner of which had not been seen before in the eastern steppes [Fig.7.5]. A few gilded iron belt ornaments with tear-shaped inlays were found at Burkhan tolgoi [Fig.6.35f], further indicating the trend of such inlayed precious metal artifacts included in all levels of élite burials which bears striking resemblance to treasures of Central Asian groups further west.



Fig.7.6 Iron with silver foil horse ornaments from (a) Noyon uul (Tseveendorj et al. 2007) and (b) Gol Mod (Desroches and André 2007)



Fig.7.7 Bronze mirror with Cupid and Aphrodite, tomb 20, Noyon uul (Tseveendorj et al. 2007: 292)

Numerous sets of iron silver-covered bridle ornaments have been found in square tombs at Tsaraam (Minyaev and Sakharovskaya 2007), Noyon uul (Rudenko 1961), and Gol Mod (Desroches and André 2007), and many of them depict a form of unicorn which can stylistically be tied to artistic motifs in the West (Yeruul-Erdene 2007) [Fig.7.6]. Several well preserved textile fragments found at Noyon uul can also be tied to Hellenistic art (Rudenko 1961; Tseveendorj et al. 2007), and a bronze mirror depicting Dionysus and a nymph was recently found in one of the square tombs at Noyon uul, further suggesting connections with trade networks to the Hellenistic world (Tseveendorj et al. 2007) [Fig.7.7]. The famous griffin carpet from Noyon uul tomb 6 exhibits established steppe motifs in animal art which were nevertheless a result from significant influence from further west (Rudenko 1961) [Fig.7.8].¹⁰⁷ We are also fortunate to have

¹⁰⁷ Exhaustive research has been done on the western origins of most of the art found in Pazyryk (cf. Rubinson 1990), where the same form of griffin and reindeer motif as the Noyon uul tapestry was seen (Rudenko 1970). Similar manners of the griffin motif were seen in belt art of the third and second centuries BC (Tal'ko-Gryntsevich 1999), exhibiting continuity from the late Bronze Age tombs of Pazyryk through to the later square tombs of the Mongolian steppes. While the prey of the griffin changes between rams,

the full set of the deceased's garments from the same tomb as the numerous felt carpets and tapestries. Despite the presence of some silk fabric from China, the fur material and particular style of garments remain definitively steppe-style, seen in tomb wall art and figurines [Fig.7.9]. The motifs on the garments include a four-leafed emblem (discussed below) sewn into the knees of the leggings and a pair of swirl designs, equivalent to iconography seen on Bronze Age deer stones (Volkov 1967), placed prominently on the outer fur hat.

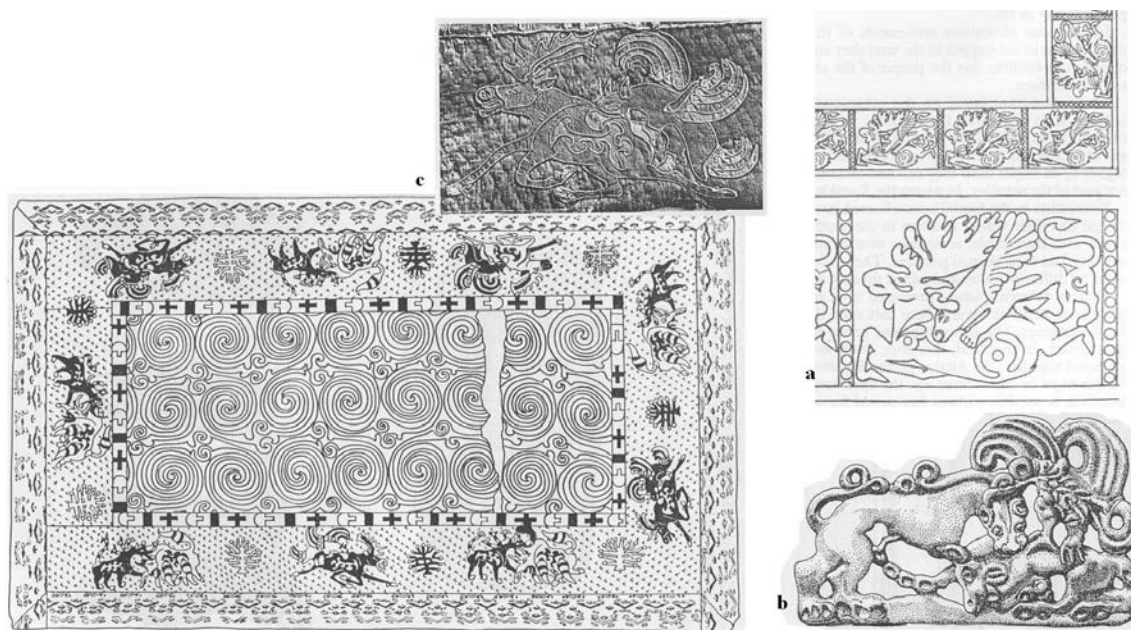


Fig. 7.8 Griffin art: (a) griffin and reindeer leather cover, Pazyryk tomb 2 (Rudenko 1970:79); (b) griffin in animal combat bronze open-work belt plaque, Derestuy grave 7 (Tal'ko-Gryntsevich 1999; drawing from Rudenko 1961: Fig.44) (c) griffin and reindeer tapestry, Noyon uul tomb 6 (Rudenko 1961:Fig.78,pl.xlv)

panthers, reindeer and other animals, they form and style of the mythical creature remains more or less the same as does its predatory position. This issue is mentioned here only to highlight the far-reaching and long-standing connections westward, regardless of the exact origins or manners of transferral for such styles and motifs.

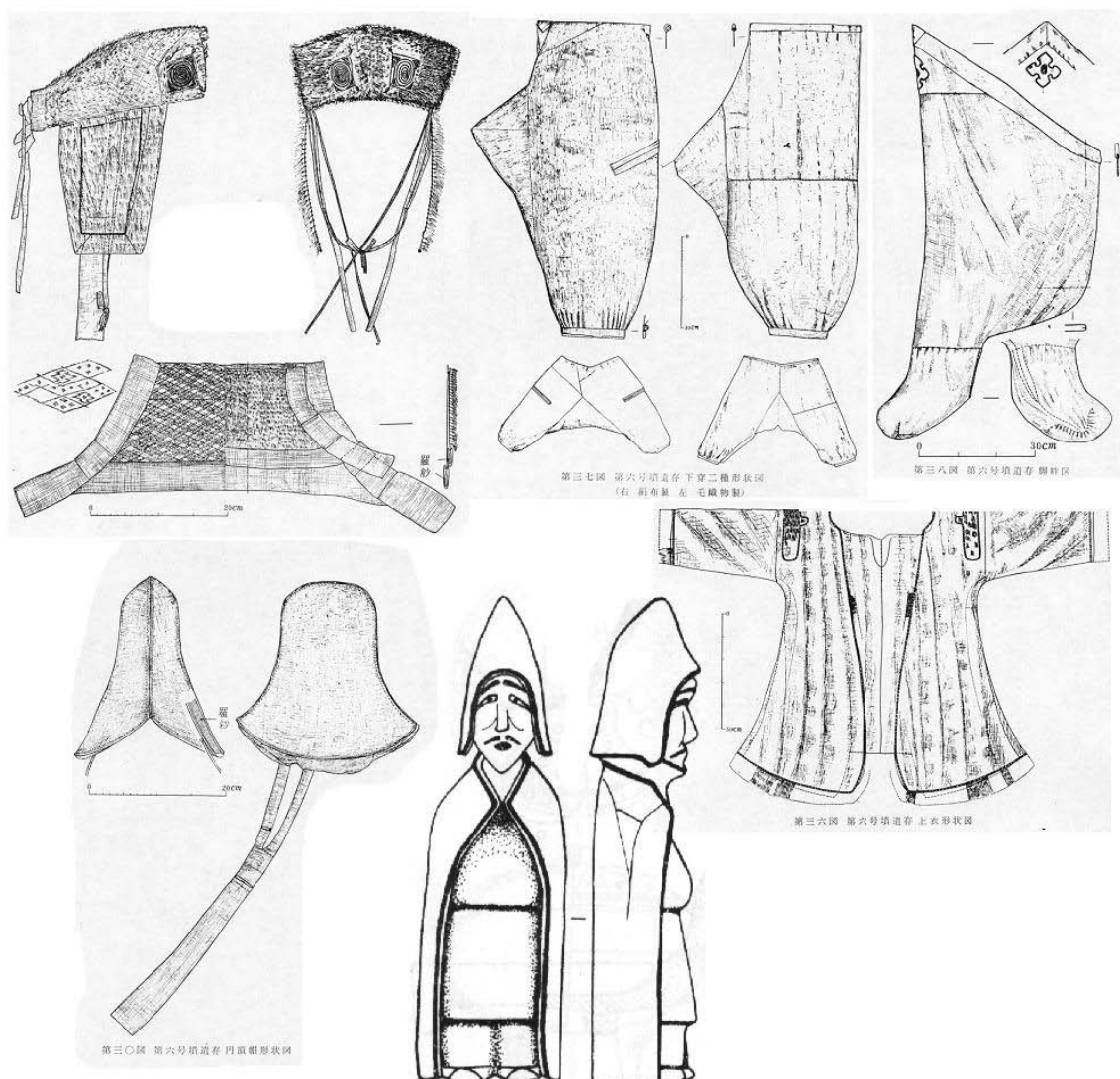


Fig.7.9 Steppe-style garments: (a) Clothing from Noyon uul tomb 6 (Umehara 1960: figs.30,33,36-38); (b) figurine, Zhaowan, Inner Mongolia (Wei 1998: 152)

Influence and imports from the southern neighbors were also not without precedent. Chinese style bronze mirrors had made their way northward as early as the fourth century BC, seen in the fragment of a *shan* 山 character motif mirror in Pazyryk tomb 6 (Rudenko 1970: 115), and into the second century BC, as exemplified by the

Chinese mirror fragments found at Ivolga settlement (Davydova 1995).¹⁰⁸ In the first century BC, however, the number of fragments of Chinese mirrors dramatically increased. As stated above, these mirrors, in contrast to the Central Asian style mirrors, were more often than not found as fragments of the original wholes and occurred in much greater numbers within the burials [Fig.6.38]. While the exact meaning and intent behind this differential treatment of mirrors may elude us, it is significant in so far as these foreign objects of the same supposed function did not appear to replace the previous mirrors. They retained their foreign status and became offerings for the deceased in a manner much different than the traditional mirrors of the steppes.

Particular to the square tombs were the inclusions of Chinese style chariots placed overtop the chambers [Figs.6.55b, 7.10]. The lacquered chariot boxes and bronze decorative finials indisputably indicate Chinese manufacture of these vehicles, yet their inclusion in these elite graves does not herald the adoption of Chinese customs. The single seated vehicle was undoubtedly a symbol of the mobile leader in constant movement (Andrews 1999), and the chariot was considered one of the gifts which would please the steppe leaders most.¹⁰⁹ Like mirrors, the vehicle had already been an important ritual item in steppe cultures before the appearance of Chinese equivalents. With these

¹⁰⁸ It is curious that no mirror fragments were found in the burial grounds at either Derestuy or Ivolga (Davydova 1996; Minyaev 1998), even though they contained several finds of Chinese coins.

¹⁰⁹ The “Three Models Five Baits” (*san biao wu er* 三表五餌) proposal put forth by the Chinese court scholar Jia Yi 賈誼 (in *Xin shu* 新書) outlined a diplomatic method to sedate the aggressive northern neighbors and quell the threat from the steppes. The five baits included categories of gifts which would cater specifically to the tastes of the northerners, and among these gifts were, naturally, vehicles for the local leaders. This proposal is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

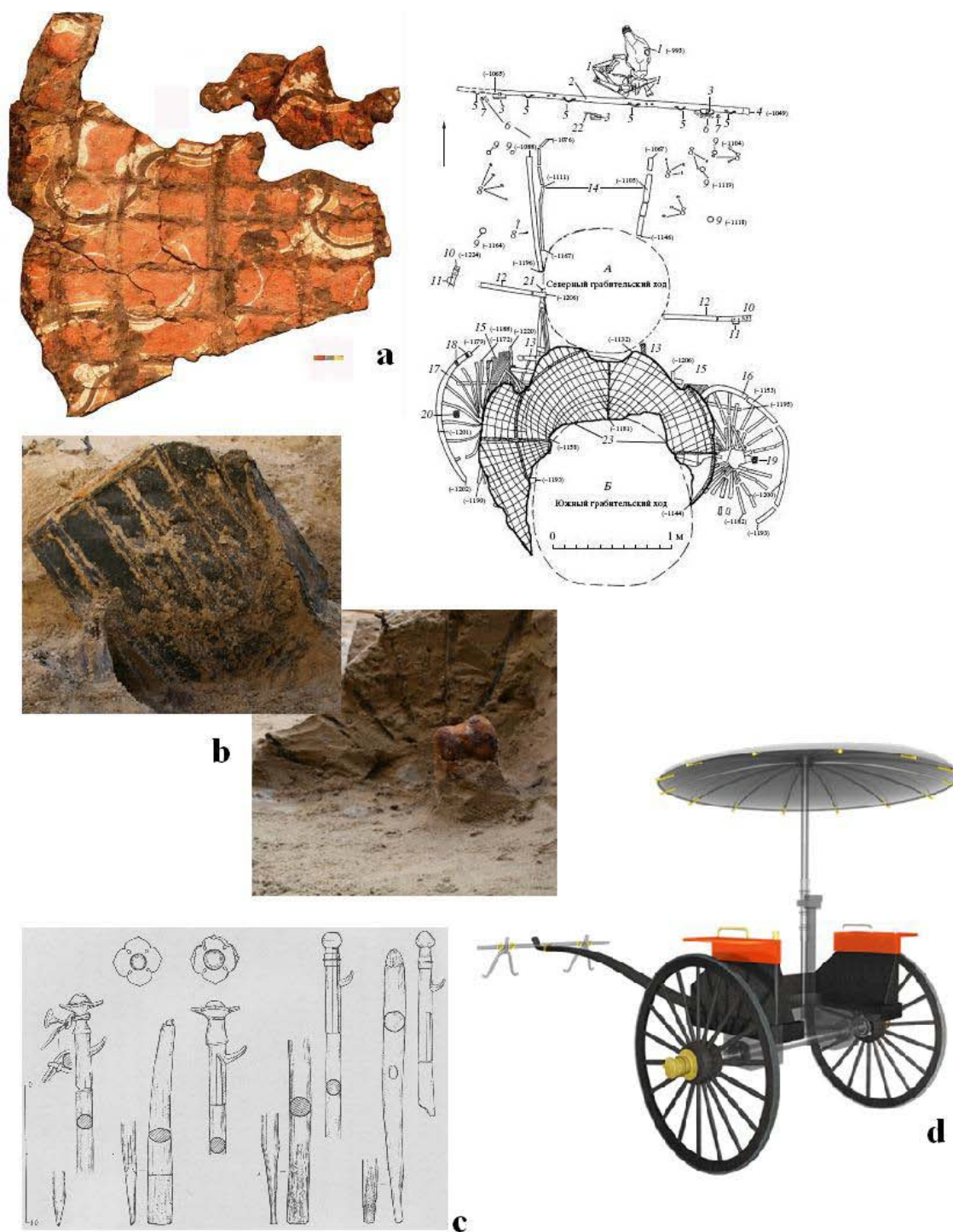


Fig. 7.10 Chinese chariots in the square tombs: (a) Tsaraam tomb 7, full chariot and red lacquered chariot box (Minyaev and Sakharovskaya 2007b: 47-48); (b) Durlig nars tomb 2, wheel and black lacquered chariot box (National Museum of Korea 2008: 166); (c) Noyon uul, bronze chariot fittings (Umehara 1960: 91); (d) Gol Mod tomb 20, reconstruction of chariot (Desroches and André 2007: 75)

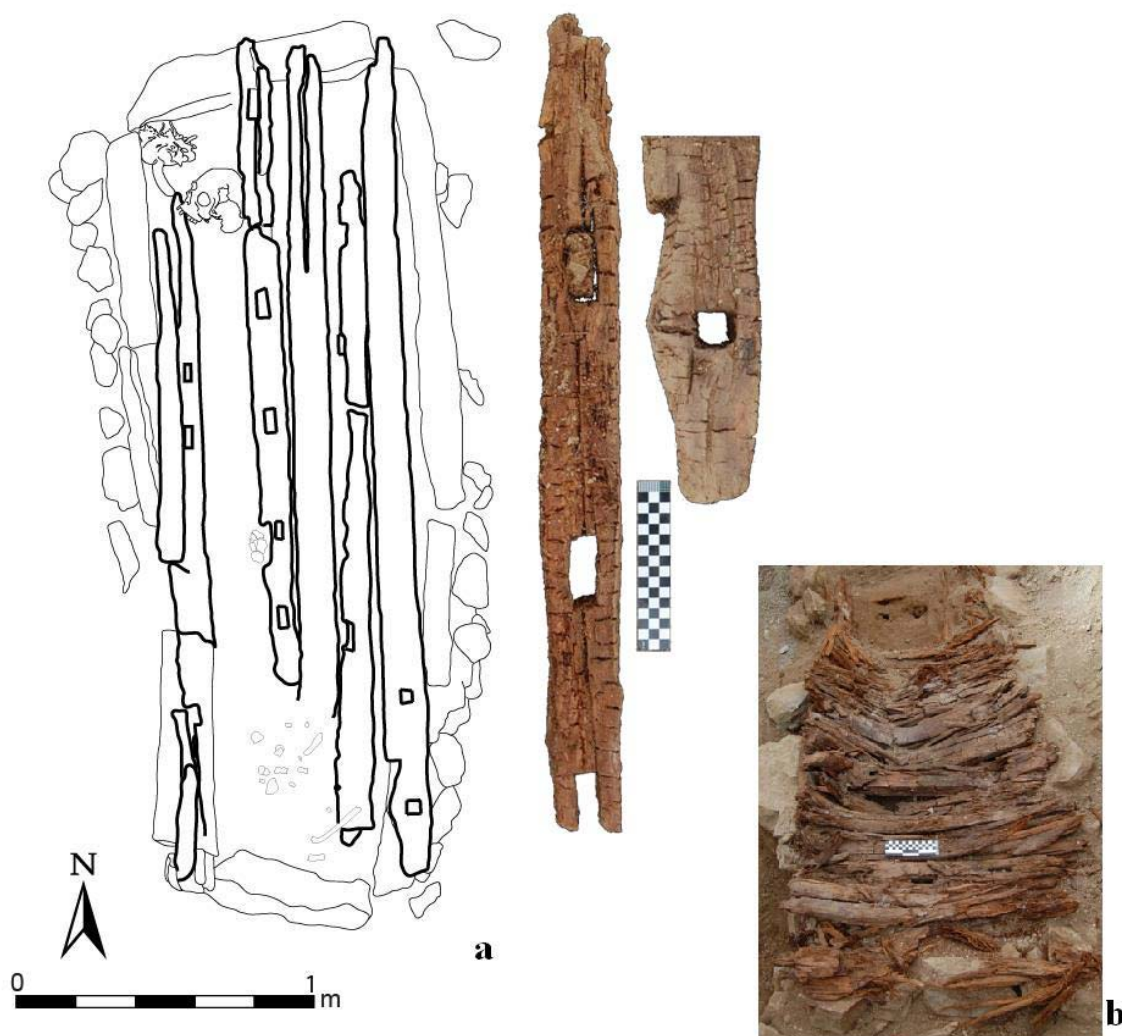


Fig. 7.11 Wooden cart pieces over coffins, Shombuuziin belchir graves (a) 12 and (b) 16 (Miller et al. 2009)

foreign chariots, however, we do see a similar treatment of domestic style vehicles in mortuary contexts. In even some of the most meager burials, the beams of broken carts are placed across the top of the containment for the deceased. Portions of large carts, including wheel sets and yoke beams, were found lain across stone cysts or wooden coffins in Shombuuziin belchir cemetery in the Mongolian Altai (Miller et al. 2009) [Fig.7.11] and Tevsh uul in the northern Gobi (Tseveendorj 1989) [Fig.7.33a]. It is thus

clear that the exotic imports were integrated into the steppe custom of placing a vehicle, perhaps that which carried the dead, overtop the chamber of the deceased. The form of the vehicle for the deceased in these square tombs may have altered to a foreign style, but the change in style does not appear to have altered its essential significance (cf. Arnold 1990: 85).



Fig. 7.12 Chinese lacquered bowls and cups: (a) inscribed cup, Noyon uul tomb 5; (b) cup, Noyon uul tomb 23; (c) inscribed bowl, Tamiryn ulaan hoshoo; cup, Noyon uul tomb 6 (after Louis 2007)

Chinese lacquered wares also appeared in the midst of the sudden increase in foreign goods. An assortment of lacquered vessels and equipment has been found in the

square tombs alongside Chinese style bronze basins and vases (Desroches and André 2007; Minyaev and Sakharovskaya 2007a; Mission 2003; Tseveendorj et al. 2007; Umehara 1960), yet it is lacquered bowls and ear-handled cups that pervade both the square tombs and the standard circular graves [Fig.7.12]. These lacquered items introduced not only a new style of vessel in the burials but a new function: individual serving vessels. Before considering their place in the steppe burials, I will address the culture and context from which they came.

Arguably one of the most numerous kinds of lacquered vessels in the Western Han graves was the ear-handled cups (Chen 2007). In the larger graves they were interred as plentiful sets in an assemblage of banqueting accoutrements [Fig.7.13]. Some cups were painted with characters naming their function as “[for] the lord’s favored food” (*jun xing shi* 君幸食) or “[for] the lord’s favored alcohol” (*jun xing jiu* 君幸酒), evidencing the dual use of the ear-handled cups for eating or drinking in élite banquets (Hong 2006: 23-25). The lacquered vessels in smaller graves, when such prestigious items did exist, were more often than not cups. The correlation between burial size and number of cups, and the assemblages in which they occur, seems to indicate a difference between those among the Han élite who were interred with cups as components of much larger banqueting sets in addition to their own personal vessels versus those who were interred simply with single serving vessels. The separation of personal vessels versus sets for entertaining became clearer in the first century BC with the introduction of brick chamber tombs and their separation of spaces of activity. Sets of ear cups were laid on tray tables nearer the chamber entrance while personal vessels were set beside the deceased

[Fig.7.14], and contemporary tomb art depicted the use of these cups as welcoming guests and entertaining them at banquets [Fig.7.15].

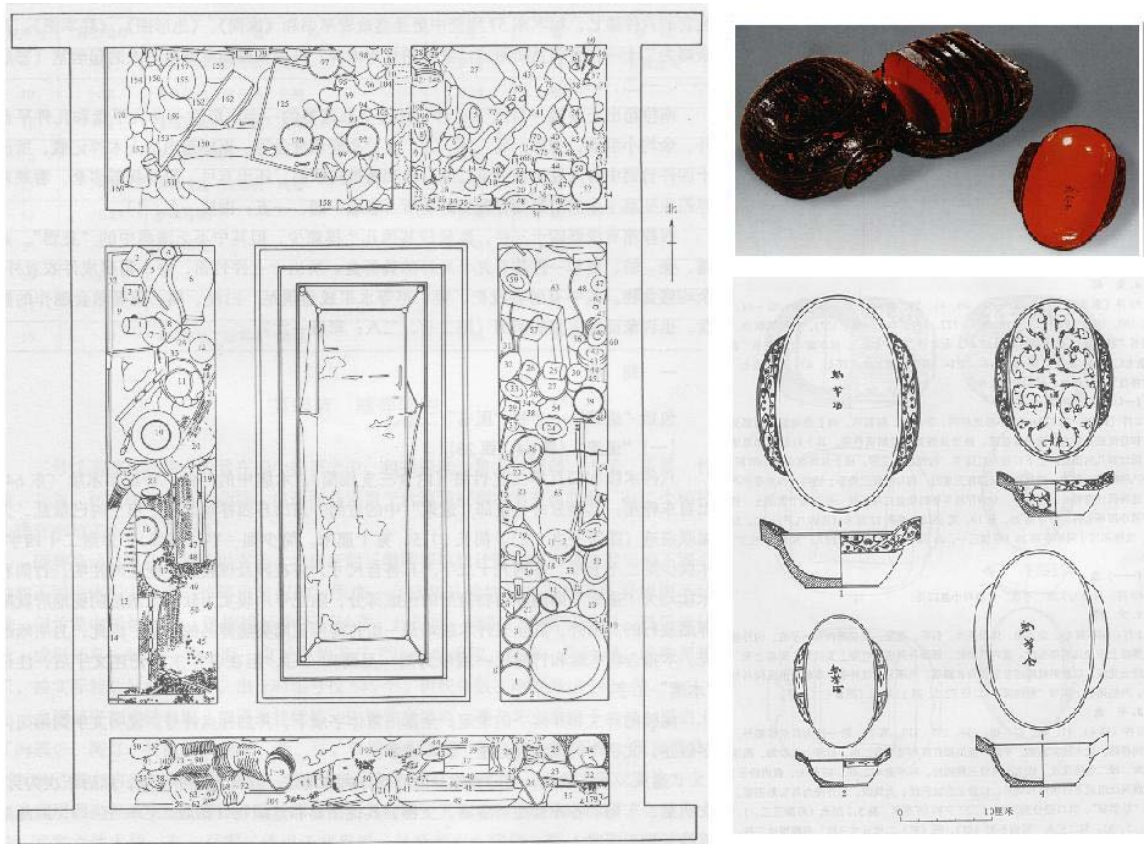


Fig. 7.13 Mawangdui Han tomb 3 and lacquer cups (Hunan 2004: 44, 129, pl.xxxi)

Taking into account the degree of looting in many of the graves, there is still a noticeable discrepancy between the pattern of large sets of cups in greater Chinese burials versus the small number of lacquer cups or bowls in even the grandest of steppe tombs. The ear-handled cups in the circular graves, when found, are also lacquered and come as a single vessel or the rare pair [Fig.6.32a]. The more regular presence of individual serving vessels in the steppe burials in beginning in the late first century BC constitutes a significant departure from the earlier graves which contained almost exclusively storage

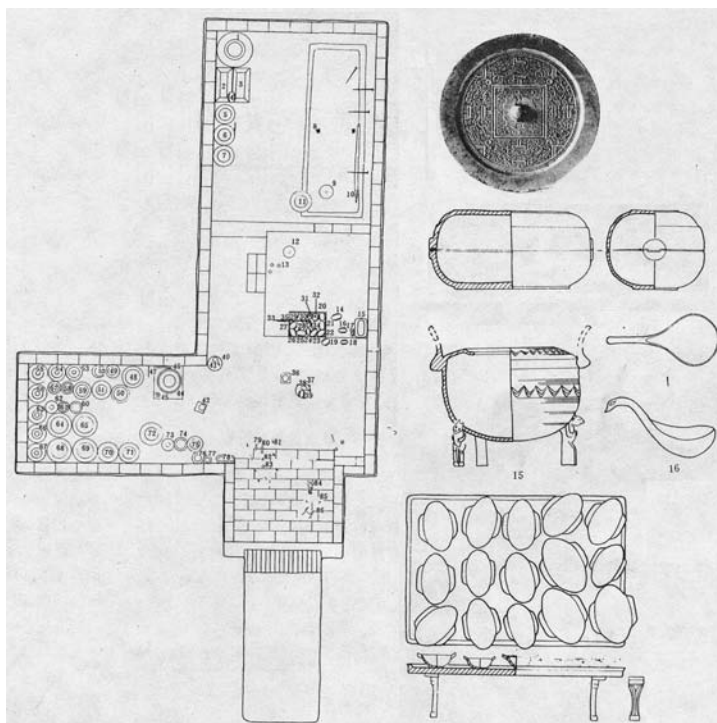
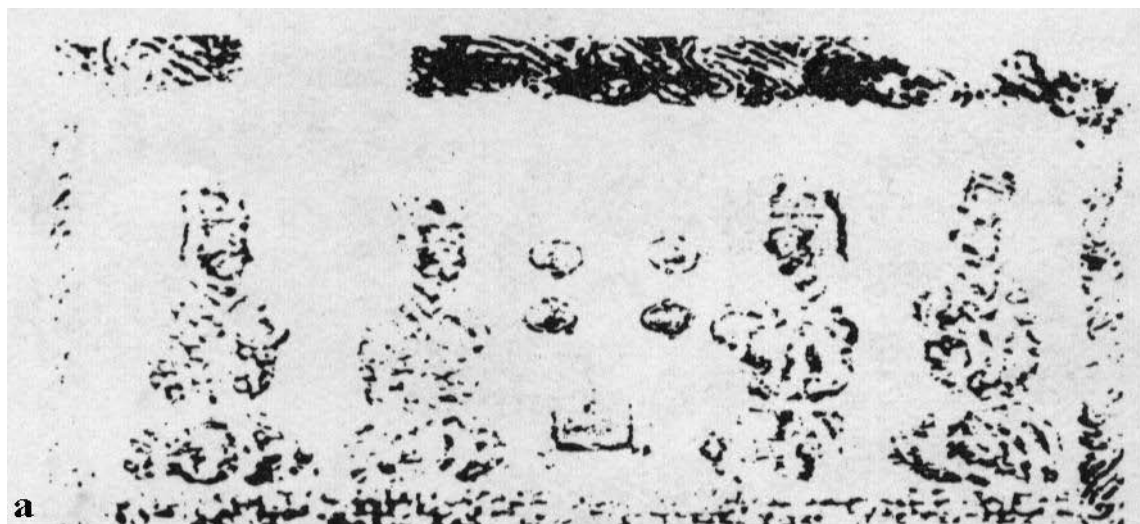


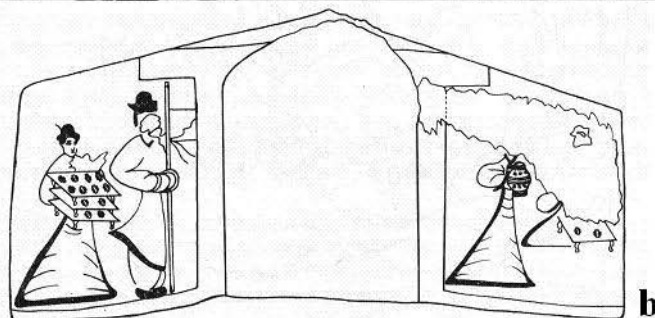
Fig. 7.14 Wunuzhong tomb 267 and ceramic cups (after Luoyang 1996)

and cooking vessels. One might deduce that this change in burial custom, which also introduced a foreign style of vessel, indicates the adoption of a Chinese style of banqueting and drinking. Why, then, were there no sizeable sets of these cups in the monumental tombs? We may find the reason in the exotic nature, and hence increased prestige, of these lacquered luxury items.

The Chinese style cups in steppe burials also differ from their contemporary Chinese counterparts in material. The imperial workshops which had flourished during the Qin and Western Han periods began to lessen their output and quality during the late first century BC, and markets were flooded with privately manufactured, often lower quality, lacquer wares beginning in the Eastern Han (Barbieri-Low 2007: 81). The



a



b



c

Fig. 7.15 Han tomb art depicting ear-handle cups: (a) Xuzhou (Wang and Li 1996:28) (b,c) Fenghuangshan (Wei 1998: 171, color plate 5.2)

opulent assemblages of lacquer vessels in the Western Han tombs began to diminish in the first century BC (Chen 2007; Hong 2006; Louis 2007) and were replaced in the burials by mass produced ceramic vessels (see Luoyang 1959). Nevertheless, it is the lacquer versions of these cups which appear in the steppe tombs of the first century BC and after rather than their inferior ceramic equivalents. There is also no evidence in the steppes for importation or local imitation production of the ear-handle cups. The steppe élite appear not to have desired these cups merely for their form and function in Chinese style banquets, or the archaeological record would have yielded significant numbers of ceramic versions of these ear-handled cups as well.

Since the lacquered cups and bowls did not replace previous steppe versions, they represent the introduction of a new element of individual serving vessels in the steppe burials, and possibly into the associated feasts. The manner in which they were used in funerary or other banquets is difficult to reconstruct, but their context in burials, beside other items related to food storage and consumption, implies they had indeed become part of the assemblage of banqueting accoutrements. In her research on drinking vessels in ancient Gallic burials, Bettina Arnold (1990: 73) notes the custom of the “common cup” mentioned in contemporary records of the time for explaining the small number of foreign serving vessels. I would not venture to assume a “gathering around the wine vessel” also explains the small number of Chinese cups in the steppe burials, but such a difference in drinking customs between the culture from which the vessels come and the society into which they were imported could very well explain the dissimilarity between the Chinese and Xiongnu burials. By their contexts in the burials, these foreign vessels

were probably integrated into local feasting customs and took a place in the assemblage of prestigious goods incorporated into the funerary ceremony and interment.

Monumental Tombs

The appearance of monumental square tombs in the late first century BC heralded attempts by portions of the ruling groups to not only create new traditions that could separate them from the remaining social élites but also distinguish them from the ruling élite of neighboring polities. In this respect the square tombs served a dual function of both vertical and horizontal distinctions, the latter of which will be addressed here. The new form of burial was deliberately distinct from the circular grave tradition, and many scholars have put forth notions on the sources of this tradition which purport the emulation of cultures outside the Mongolian steppes, namely China (cf. Huang 2008). While influence from these peer polities is undeniable, I argue that the underlying dynamic of these similarities is not imitation or emulation but rather appropriation of monumental styles and foreign artifacts, combining them into a new mortuary cultural compilation which, in its entirety, was still distinct from the mortuary traditions of the neighboring polities.

The seemingly sudden appearance of large mounded tombs overshadowed the contemporary flat stone circles, but did not constitute a great departure from steppe traditions. The landscape of Bronze Age kurgans and khirigsuur complexes, into which the Iron Age cemeteries were placed, clearly demonstrates an established tradition of monumentality in the steppes. Regardless of the manner of execution, these monumental square tombs with a surrounding complex of accompanying burials and offerings

unmistakably echo the concept of the khirigsuur complexes.¹¹⁰ Some features, such as the deposits of burnt crushed animal bones between outlying sets of stones, even exhibit a continuation of traditions (Bayarsaikhan and Miller 2007). The square form, earthen construction with stone retaining wall, and funerary entry ramp all differ greatly from the Bronze Age precedent, however, and I will now consider the multiple possibilities for the sources of these styles and features of construction.

In looking for precedents to these square tombs, we find strong correlations to the ramped stepped pit elite tombs of China during the Eastern Zhou 東周 and early Western Han 西漢 periods (mid to late first millennium BC) [Fig.7.16], though by the middle Western Han these had already begun to transform into ramps down to the brick chamber catacombs, often with more than one individual, of the first century BC and later. A ramped and stepped pit form similar to these earlier Chinese tombs can be seen in the detailed excavations at Noyon uul and Il'movaya pad' [Fig.6.54c,d]. Nevertheless, some features of construction for those tombs found in the steppes do not appear in China. Long cross-cutting walls inside the pits, made from either wood or stone [Figs.6.54d,6.57a], extend from the surface of the mound to the top of the chamber below. The additional stone retaining walls around the exterior of the mounds find a parallel in the large mounded burials of the Yenesei River [Fig.6.75d,e]. These mounded tombs of South Siberia also have a trapezoidal entry, though the chamber is only semi-subterranean and holds several people, much like the late Bronze Age log chambers of

¹¹⁰ A debate exists on whether the central mounds of all of the khirigsuurs were in fact burials (cf. Wright 2007). The comparison made here stands mainly to underscore the development of the square tombs in a preexisting landscape of monumentality, wherein large mounds with associated features of offerings had served as foci of community rituals and identity.

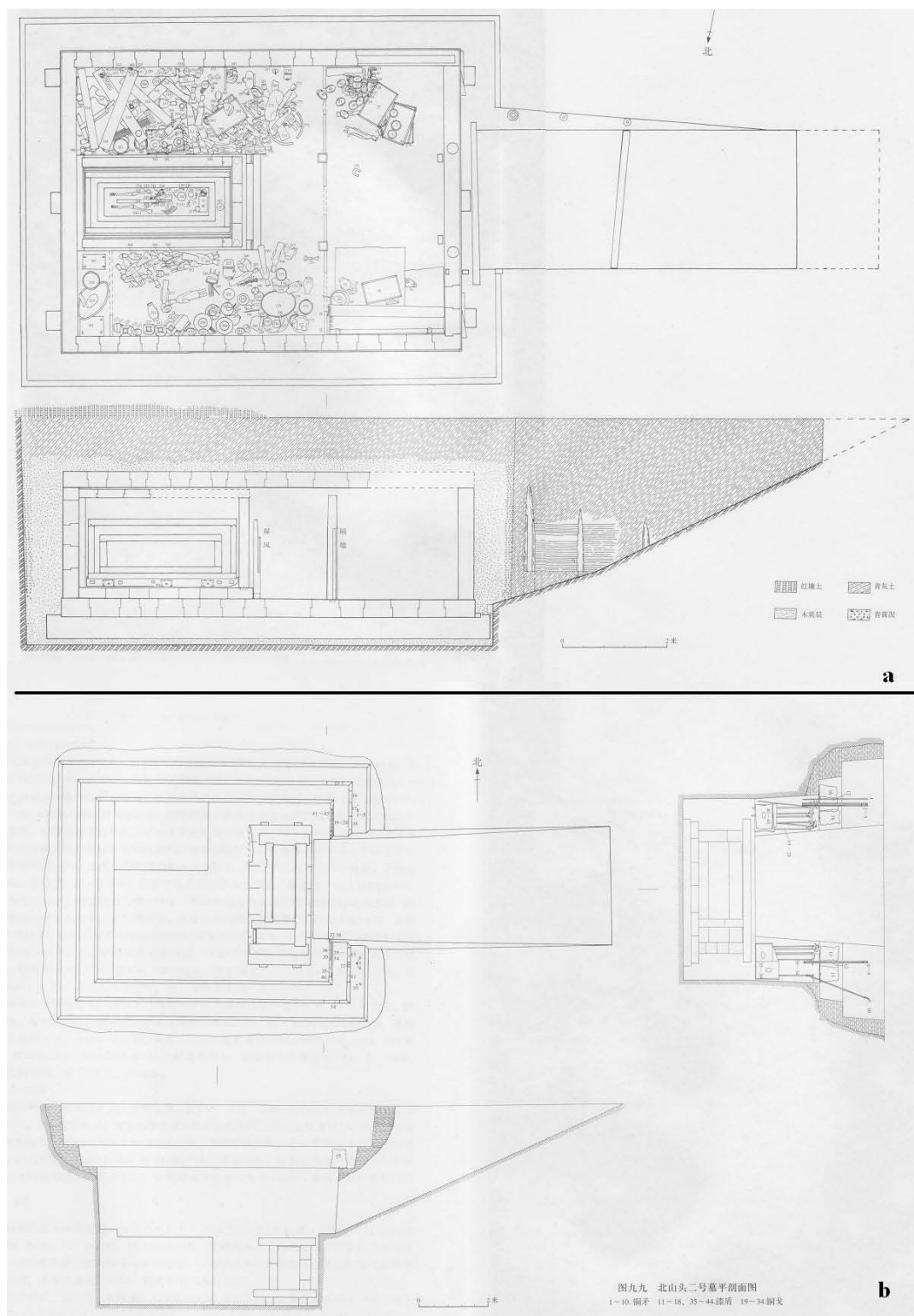


Fig. 7.16 Chaohu Han tombs (Anhui and Chaohu 2007: figs.4,99)

Chandman (Novgorodova et al. 1982). In both cases, tomb entries led to a form of chamber door which may have allowed for the reopening of the grave for later interments. This does not appear to have been the case for the square tombs of single interments, whose ramped entries did not lead to a chamber door and long stone or log walls within the tomb pit would have obstructed re-entry. Detailed excavations have revealed the placement of stacked stone walls at the end of the ramped entries, sometimes with artifacts placed within (Miller et al. 2008; Minyaev and Sakharovskaya 2007a).¹¹¹ These may be equated with doors to the tomb, but only in a symbolic manner since they were sealed in a way that was not conducive to reopening and sometimes placed far above the chamber level.

Of these comparable grave traditions, only the mounded tombs from the Yenesei region were contemporary with the square tombs of the Mongolian steppes. Beginning in the middle of the Western Han, brick chambered catacomb tombs spread from the Central Plains and eventually became the dominant trend throughout China from the late first century BC onward (Huang 2003). By the time the square tombs appeared in the elite cemeteries of the northern steppes, multi-chambered brick tombs had become the preference for the higher ranks of the Chinese empire. Even tombs at the periphery had mostly shifted to the brick chamber catacomb form [Fig.6.66]. Only a few rare exceptions such as Zhaowan tomb 51 [Fig.6.67] bore any resemblance to the square mounded tombs with ramps leading to a complex wooden chamber and coffin, and even in this case we see a striking difference in grave form.

¹¹¹ We should be reminded that tomb 64 at Takhiltin khotgor has an entry even more symbolic, since the ramp does not even come to the top of the chamber level [Fig.6.60].

The steppe élite of the first century BC may have copied certain manners of tomb construction known by the Chinese, but those styles were not predominant in China during that time. This chronological discrepancy hinders any assertion that the steppe leaders were imitating the Chinese contemporary mortuary trends, much less emulating China. Further disparities arise when we consider the full set of features for these square tomb complexes. Tombs of the Chinese rulers were not without their sets of accompanying features, yet they bore no resemblance either before – as seen in the tomb complex of the Chinese emperor Han Wudi [Fig.7.17] – or during the time of the square tombs. The adjacent lines of accompanying human graves to the east and west as well as the parallel stone lines with burnt animal offerings to the north of the square mounds not only appear particular to the tombs of the Mongolian steppes but might also have roots in the traditions of the monumental ritual complexes of the Bronze Age and early Iron Age cultures outlined in the previous chapter. The upper echelons of the steppe élite consciously created a new form of tomb structure, drawing on both the monumental and ritual traditions of the Mongolian steppes and preceding construction manners of tombs in China and South Siberia. This distinguished them, in funerary style and labor investment, from the other members of the élite while apparently still adhering to native ritual traditions.

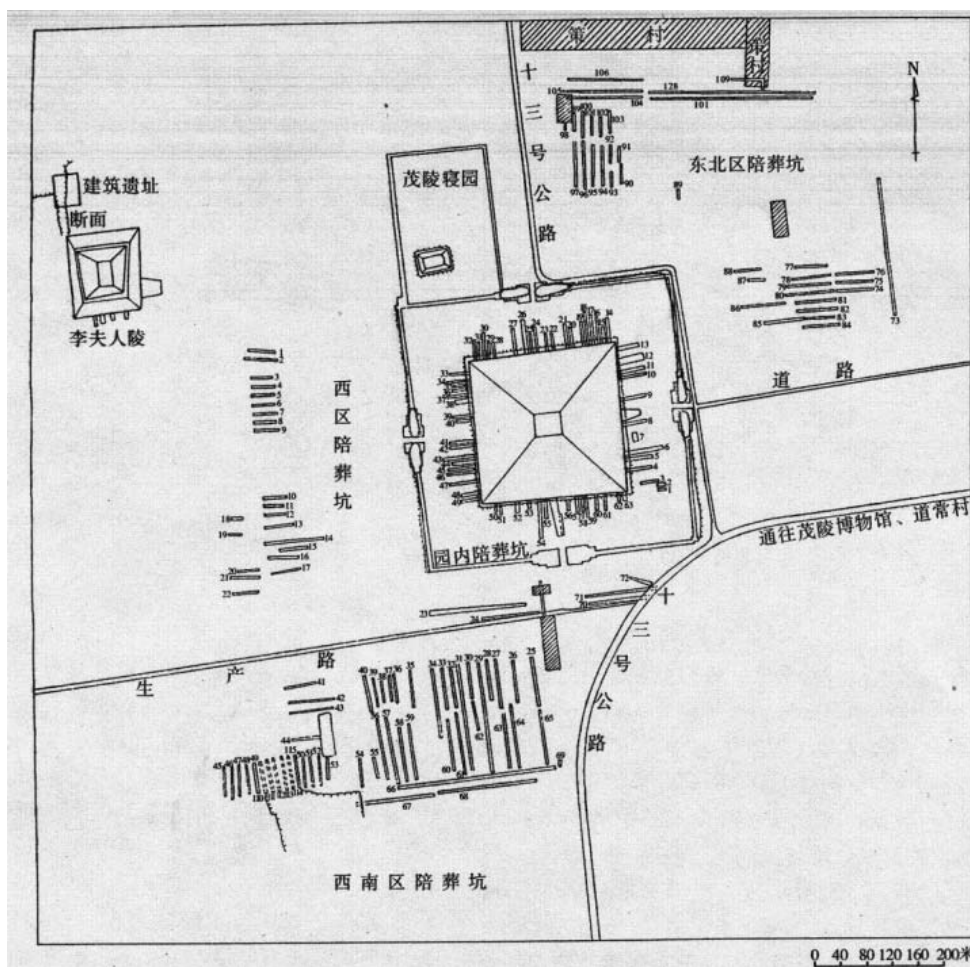


Fig. 7.17 Maoling mausoleum of Emperor Han Wudi (Xianyang 2007: 25)

It should be noted that despite the change in burial structure for these new, larger tombs, the treatment of the body remained the same. The deceased were still placed in a stretched supine position in graves by themselves,¹¹² with the head oriented north. The vast majority of the circular graves were oriented between north (61%) and northwest (27%), and the deviations from this appear to be spread evenly and sparsely across sites in central Mongolia, mixed within cemeteries of predominantly northern orientation.

¹¹² A small number of circular graves contained two individuals – within the same coffin, in adjacent pits beneath the same circular surface marker, or as one interment in a niche beside the other – but all the square tombs excavated thus far have been single interments. This contrasts starkly with the contemporary catacomb tombs of the Han which by and large contained paired interments.

Without complete chronologies and reports of all these circular burials, it is impossible to discern the implications of this minor deviation. Square tombs, on the other hand, exhibit almost no variation in orientation. The tombs surveyed at Gol Mod 2 and Takhiltin khotgor show all tombs oriented between north and northwest, with only a handful of exceptions oriented northeast. From these statistical surveys, and a view of Gol Mod which was also mapped precisely [Fig.6.62b], we can see that no where do these larger tombs exhibit variation toward the south, east or west as do some of the circular graves, and all appear to conform to a north to northwest orientation. As treatment of the body reflects religious practices, this more uniform adherence to such practices in the case of the square tombs might signify a greater degree of cohesion in ritual traditions.

The only examples of deviation from the stretched supine positioning of the body occur in the partially flexed interments of Aimrylyg XXXII within otherwise standard circular graves [Fig.6.76] and similar positioning for those interred in the satellite graves of the square tombs at Takhiltin khotgor [Fig.6.60]. This may be explained by the contemporary and preceding traditions of the western regions for interring the deceased with their legs flexed [Figs.6.7-15] and was perhaps an example of the merging of local religious practices with material funerary traditions from an intruding culture. Upholding certain treatments of the corpse may be interpreted as an adherence to specific religious practices rather than a specific ethnic marker (Falkenhausen 2006: 216), but for most of the graves in the Mongolian steppes it nonetheless exhibits a continuity with the mortuary customs of the long established circular graves despite changes for both circular graves and square tombs of the first century BC and after.

Chamber Elaboration

The majority of containments for the body consisted of wood plank coffins, and the variations of grave furnishing beyond the simple wooden coffin added to the spectrum of funeral customs. As stated before, it is not my aim to fully reconstruct all portions of society in the steppes, but the varied means of burial furnishing elaboration overtop the standard coffin containment nonetheless draw attention to indications of attempts by various levels of the élite to distinguish themselves in the mortuary arena. Differences in furnishing material and complexity discussed in the previous chapter show a preponderance of wood for the immediate containment of the body and a large number of double furnishings, with either wood or stone for the outer containment [Fig.6.44]. If we accept the chronological attribution of Derestuy cemetery to more or less the second century BC, then we can observe an early appearance of a qualitative difference in furnishing style which continued in later circular graves and was built upon for the chambers of the square tombs. Though the upper and lower edges of most wood plank coffins protruded slightly outward [Fig.6.45b], the corners of many coffins inside the double nested furnishings were more or less flush [Fig.6.45c]. In addition, many of these coffins were executed with more intricate interlocking features, namely the butterfly tenons [Fig.6.45d]. The main difference in these earlier tenon-and-mortis coffins and the later renditions beginning in the first century BC is the appearance of coffin ornamentation.

The issue of wood – the choice to use it and the amount of it used – became a crucial concern in dry areas such as the Gobi-Altai where trees are scarce. A series of coffins excavated at Shombuuziin belchir in the upper valleys of the Mongolian Altai has

raised this issue of use and availability of wood (Miller et al. 2009). The wood coffins in the larger circular graves were made from large wooden planks, which must have come from broad trunked trees which do not presently exist in the area and likely did not during the time of interment. Most of the smaller burials excavated thus far at Shombuuziin belchir and Takhiltin khotgor – those marked with a small circle or cluster of stones – contain either stone cysts or no burial furnishing at all. The choice for the larger circular graves to use wood in an area where it is scarce – or, in the case of the wood for broad planks, nonexistent – signals an adherence to a tradition that ties these peripheral graves to those in the areas of central Mongolia and South Siberia, where many of the mountains and northern reaches are covered in larch or birch trees.

While coffins containing the body were by and large constructed from wood planks, the majority of outer coffins into which these were placed were made from hewn logs, even for the large square tombs [Figs.6.53, 6.59]. These varied more in size, perhaps due to their function of containing not only the body and coffin but also an array of burial goods. The nested wooden coffins of these tombs have been equated to those of the Warring States and subsequent Western Han tombs. However, in China the walls of the outer coffers had been made from thick, square-carved wood beams up through the second century BC [Fig.7.16b] and, in the later catacomb tombs, transitioned into a packing of ceramics and eventually completely brick chambered structures by the time of the square tombs of the steppes. On the other hand, the half-hewn or notched log chambers of the Yenesei River area were contemporary with the square tombs of the Mongolian steppes. Again, these similarities suggest a degree of interaction and perhaps cultural borrowing but do not exhibit a blanket imitation of neighboring traditions.



Fig.7.18 Warring States bronze mirrors with quatrefoil motifs (Wu 1999: 695, after Kong and Liu 1984)

The quatrefoil motif that adorned the more elaborate coffins of the steppe élite seems to have begun in China in the mid to late first millennium BC.¹¹³ It appears in varied forms on bronze mirrors during the Warring States period [Fig.7.18], though in each case the set of four spade-shaped leaves remains consistent. The quatrefoil motif continues to appear on Chinese mirrors, as late as the early Eastern Han, surrounding the central knobs [cf. Fig.7.14]. During the Western Han period it pervaded vessels of all form and material as a single quatrefoil mounted on the lid, or sometimes on the bottom of basins and bowls [Figs.6.68a, 7.18]. It also appeared as collections of leafed motifs mounted on the exterior of coffins [Fig.7.20]. The craftsmanship for these quatrefoils

¹¹³ This period of the so-called Warring States was also an era of mixed foreign and “barbarian” styles and motifs in all forms of art, so it is difficult to determine the exact origin of the leafed motif. The clear rendition of it on some early mirrors and vessels as a set of leaves necessitates referring to it as a combination of four *foils* or leaves, rather than calling it a flower. Though many Chinese archaeologists refer to it as the “persimmon leaves” (*shidi* 柿蒂) motif, there is no reference in the contemporary Chinese texts to the persimmon leaves as potent symbol.

developed from “bubble” (*pao* 泡) knob-head nails used to join exterior coffin pieces and mount exterior wrappings, especially silk. By the mid to late Western Han, as tombs began to shift toward brick chambers with functional tomb gateways, quatrefoils appeared on doors either beside knockers or standing in as the knocker ornamentation. By the late Western Han, the appearance of these gilded bronze ornaments on wooden coffins lessened to only a dozen, or even a pair [Fig.6.66]. As wooden coffins were replaced by mass produced brick containments in the Central Plains, and mass-produced stamp decorated brick coffins were produced, quatrefoils appeared among a wide variety of possible decorative motifs. Some were added with other architectural or animal components, while others were arranged in a diagonal pattern resembling the lattice decorative bands above and below the planes of ornamentation [Fig.7.21]. In short, the collective form of the quatrefoil motif varied greatly in style and material and pervaded many palettes of decoration in Chinese burials and luxury goods.



Fig.7.19 quatrefoil motif on lacquered containers, Chengdun tomb 1, Jiangsu (Jiangsu 2007: 44,48)

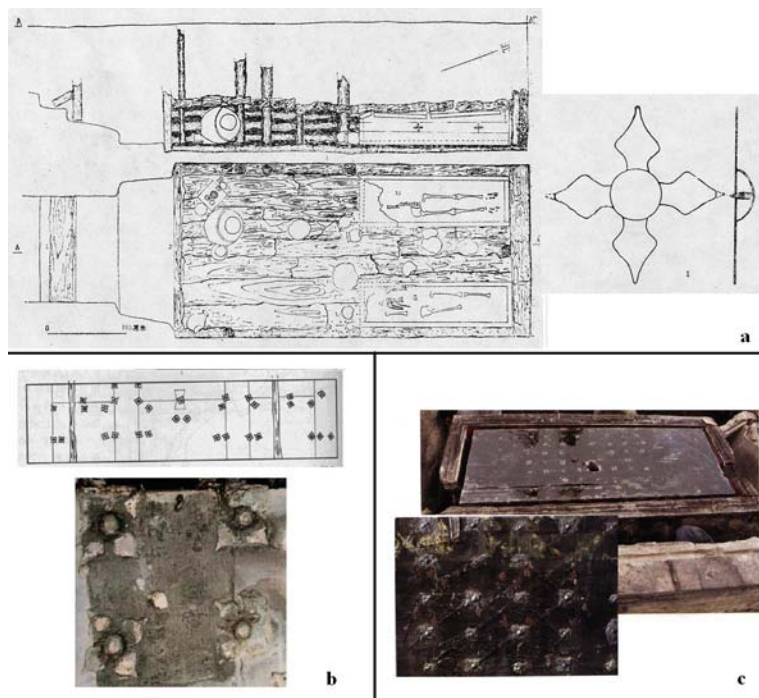


Fig.7.20 gilded bronze quatrefoil decoration on wooden coffins: (a) Wulantaolegai tomb 7, Inner Mongolia (Yikezhaomeng 1991a); (b) Chengdun tomb 1, Jiangsu (Jiangsu 2007); (c) Shuangdun tomb 1, Anhui (Wang and Yang 2007)

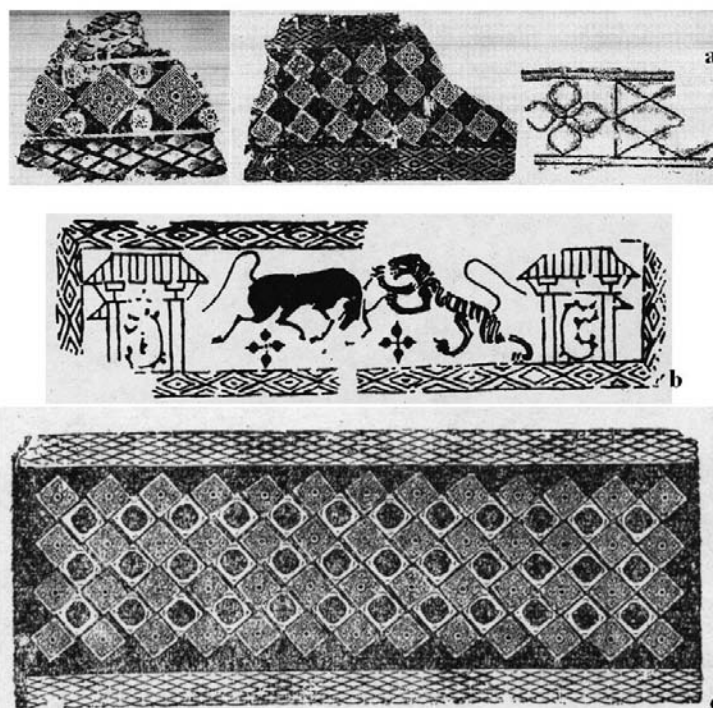


Fig.7.21 stamped-brick Han tombs with quatrefoil motifs: (a) fragments from Maoling, Shaanxi (Xianyang 2007: 29); (b) Nanyang, Henan (Wei and Gao 1995: 80); (c) Maoling, Shaanxi (Shaanxi 1982: 22)

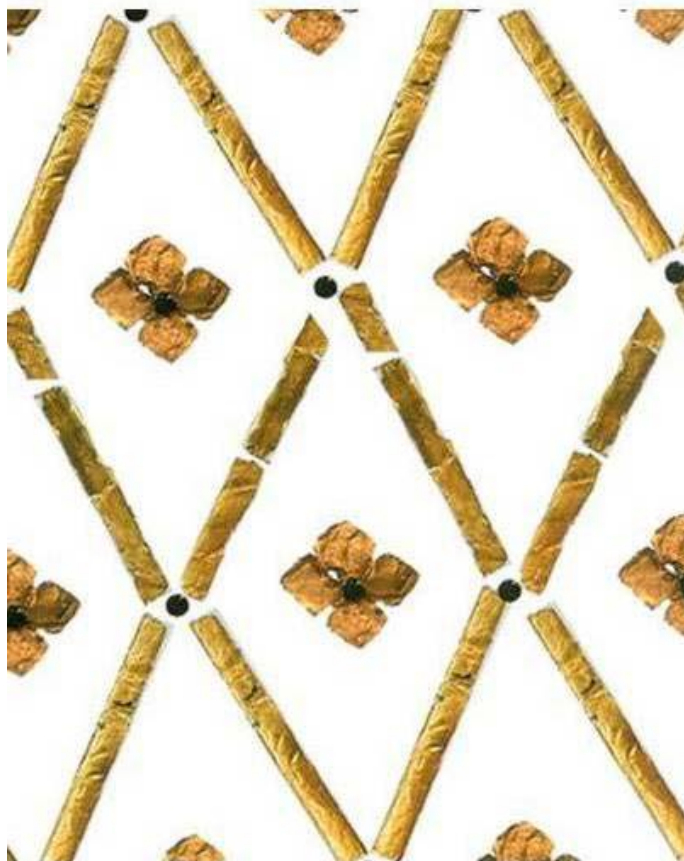


Fig. 7.22 reconstructed lattice and quatrefoil coffin decoration, Gol Mod tomb 1 (Mission 2003)

The quatrefoil ornaments found on coffins of the steppe élite exhibited no such broad variability in style or decorative framework. The relative experimentation with this motif in the Chinese graves and on Chinese ritual vessels and luxury items was not to be found in the steppes. Though the quality of craftsmanship and material varied between graves with quatrefoil decoration, all examples conformed to the setting of elongated latticework pattern into which the four-leafed icons were set, squarely at the center of each diamond opening [Fig.7.22]. The new burial conventions had perhaps borrowed this motif from outside traditions, but the assemblage of ornamentation for the steppe elite had formalized its appearance, and all coffin decoration attempted to conform to this pattern [Fig.7.23]. Even some of the more simple wooden coffins



Fig. 7.23 Lattice and quatrefoil coffin decoration, in situ: (a) iron decoration in circular grave, GM2-1-27 (Miller et al. 2006: 16); (b) iron decoration with red silk threads, tomb 64 Tahiltin hotgor (Miller et al. 2008); (c) gold decoration, Durlig nars tomb 2 (National Museum of Korea 2008: 166)



Fig. 7.24 Painted black and white latticework on red background, Shombuuziin belchir grave 15 wooden coffin (Miller et al. 2009)

emulated this style by painting parts of the decoration onto the exterior surface, in lieu of the metal ornaments and silk wrappings [Fig.7.24].

The new manner of coffin decoration had taken such a hold that the ornaments were produced in the steppes for the élite consumption, as evidenced by the noticeably different manner of manufacture from those in China. All of the Chinese quatrefoil ornaments were constructed as knob-headed pieces with the nail extending from the “bubble” center [Fig.7.20b]. Those found on coffins in the steppes were constructed as two separate pieces – one flat quatrefoil with a hole in the middle and a second pin, usually with a loop end, set through the center to mount the ornament to the coffin. Through some of these loop ends were strung silk streamers as part of the coffin wrapping [Fig.7.23b]. The most ostentatious of these quatrefoil ornaments were executed in a typical steppe fashion of thin gold foil wrapped overtop an iron framework and inlaid with precious stones [Fig.6.46]. Regardless of its origin, the quatrefoil was appropriated by the steppe élite, perhaps without transferring its original symbolic meaning, and incorporated into their formalized assemblage of burial elaboration.

The origins of the crescent and circle paired motif are more difficult to trace, though the resemblance to typical moon and sun iconography in cultures around the world seems a likely part of the meaning behind these decorative elements on the coffins [Fig.6.47]. One might make a case for connections to the crescent moon and disc sun in Chinese art, such as those depicted on the embroidered drapery found at the early Western Han site of Mawangdui in south China (Hunan 2004: 103-109), yet there existed a substantial iconographic tradition of sun and moon depictions in Bronze Age deer stone

art of Mongolia (Volkov 1967). References in the Chinese court histories to steppe beliefs in the power of the sun and moon and the associated ceremonies of ritual obeisance further indicate that a sun and moon cult had already existed in the steppes and the appearance of these crescent and disc paired motifs may represent the first manifestation.¹¹⁴ The style and placement of these sun and moon ornaments in addition to the quatrefoil and lattice-work decoration constituted a standard form of burial elaboration that was distinct to the élite of the Mongolian steppes [Fig.6.40].

Edges of Distinction

The transition in the steppes from similarities in prestige goods to a more uniform array of funerary customs during the first century BC indicates the progression beyond a combined yet fluid steppe identity in ways of life and symbolic expressions to a consistent suite of ritual practices and material traditions that fashioned a distinct collaborative identity and served to solidify the social relationships between regional groups. These formalized relationships would have provided more solid foundations of political cohesion. At the edges of this agglomerate occurred a handful of irregular mortuary features or practices within otherwise idiosyncratic burials. These discrepancies intimate the nature of the spread of this imperial material culture and its interactions with variant cultures and practices, and the participants in the other social systems that may or

¹¹⁴ The short passage regarding the worship of the sun, moon and stars reads as follows: “And the chanyu at dawn leaves camp and makes obeisance to the sun’s beginning, and at dusk makes obeisance to the moon...When beginning affairs they await the stars and moon; if the moon becomes full and strong then they attack, if the moon lessens then they withdraw troops” (而單于朝出營, 拜日之始生, 夕拜月...舉事而候星月, 月盛壯則攻戰, 月虧則退兵). [*Shiji* 110:2892]

may not have been subsumed within the Xiongnu realm, but were not identified as direct parts of the imperial political body.

The custom of flexed burials in Tuva and the Mongolian Altai appears to continue in some of the smaller graves, even though the inhabitants of these areas adopted all other material traditions of funerals practiced in central Mongolia – their use of single interments in predominantly wood coffins, circular stone or square ramped mound surface demarcations, and the occasional quatrefoil coffin decoration. The burials in these regions exhibit more of an adherence to the assembly of funerary customs and material executions than do regions of northern China. The flexed burials seen in the graves at Aimyrlyg XXXII most likely represent a component of a previous religious tradition rather than the expression of a completely separate ethnic identity.¹¹⁵

The appearance of a gold lattice and quatrefoil decorated burial furnishing at Dongheigou occurs in a large square log coffin with an assemblage of ceramics markedly different from the ceramic traditions of the Mongolian steppes [Fig.6.74b]. The coffins in far northeastern Inner Mongolia [Fig.6.65b], despite an overall similarity in their rectangular shape, exhibit a different tradition of craftsmanship and material – the use of four post construction and the frequent use of birch-bark for coffin construction. This differs greatly from the situation in the Gobi-Altai, where, even though the environment and resources are vastly different from central Mongolia and South Siberia, the craftsmanship and material of the coffins remain the same. In addition, vessels

¹¹⁵ Falkenhausen (2004) separates the custom of flexed body positioning in Qin tombs from the other material expressions of mortuary customs such as burial structure and furnishing. He argues against this custom as an ethnic marker and more for its interpretation as a religious practice, which could have been adopted or continued by certain groups regardless of other cultural traditions in use.

assemblages in northeastern Inner Mongolia include similar components of wide-mouth jars, but also contain markedly different vessels, such as the flat-bottomed birch-bark vases. These burials perhaps indicate degrees of cultural interaction and sharing, even to the point of a shared steppe identity which contrasted especially with the southern Chinese neighbors, but they do not adhere to the full set of standardized funerary customs seen in the broad expanse of territory from the arid regions of southeastern Mongolia to the forested regions of Tuva.

The most highly debated frontier of interaction for the peoples of the Mongolian steppes is that which they shared with the Chinese empire. Models of cultural interaction in Iron Age northern East Asia often center around a dichotomy of barbarian versus Chinese and construct a tension between the preservation of indigenous customs and the adoption of foreign materials and institutions. The cultural exchanges between northern groups and the Chinese have consequently been consigned to a process of social and political conversion on a relative scale of becoming Chinese – otherwise known as *sinicization* (cf. Honey 1992).¹¹⁶ The presence of Chinese goods and styles in steppe burials should not necessarily be equated with an emulation of the Central Plains expressed through cultural compliance or material manifestations of submission. We may

¹¹⁶ Sinicization as a concept is most often employed in discussions of the so-called conquest states established by northern groups over Chinese territory and populations. It is seen as both a process of acculturation and a means of legitimation for these conquerors to rule over their Chinese constituents (Honey 1996). However, ample evidence exists for the equal employment of steppe traditions, such as titles and court customs, as ideological strategies for legitimizing their rule. The dynamic observed was often a pattern of appending their political strategies more so than replacing steppe-oriented traditions with Chinese ones, or of utilizing Chinese customs or officials in inter-tribal political struggles (Holmgren 1989). The main inapplicability of this model to the present discussion stems from its origins in describing foreign rule over the Chinese, though it has been applied to several foreign polities throughout history centered in Mongolia (cf. Barfield 1989). In the process of incorporating elements of exotic material culture, the Iron Age steppe elite, as it would seem from the case of the garments found at Noyon uul tomb 6 [Fig.7.9], were neither literally nor figuratively “stripped of felt and fur” (Honey 1992).

instead entertain the notion that these northern groups were appropriating accoutrements of power without completely adopting the traditions and cultures from which they came. These foreign goods may have heralded the addition of certain customs by their inclusion in assemblages, but they did not necessarily demand the creation of a new “domain of use” (Chapman 2002: 78) and were most likely incorporated into existing social rituals and mortuary practices. The presence of Chinese goods therefore reflects not a comprehensive adoption of Chinese traditions, but rather a utilization of the exotic within local traditions and power politics within the Mongolian steppes. Chapman (2002) has also proposed that the importation of exotic goods from powerful neighboring entities often leads to their “domestication” within the importing cultures. Just as I would not argue for their presence relating to the sinification of the steppe peoples, so do I suggest that these foreign goods were not transformed in the process of their incorporation to the point of muting their opulent and alien nature. They remained *exotic* goods within *domestic* customs.

I propose that this greater region, which adheres to a distinct assemblage of materials and ritual customs correlates to a political entity which spread out from the Mongolian steppes. The conglomerate of traditions which burgeons in the first century BC constitutes a set of formalized, ritualized and repeated practices that constructed a unified identity through socially reinforcing political strategies (Renfrew 1986), and we can define those regions which participate fully in this set of practices and those which demonstrate interaction with that collection of traditions. This does not preclude the existence of a polity before such a point, but simply shows strong evidence for the existence of a steppe state in the archaeological record at this juncture. The nature of

steppe politics before the first century BC will be discussed in the consideration of historical records in the following chapter. A substantial portion of the feasting equipment and also food and drink,¹¹⁷ vehicles, and ornamentation objects and motifs, both personal and equine, in the mortuary record of the Mongolian steppe elite clearly originates from outside that region. However, these are integrated into sets of steppe customs which still differentiated them from their neighboring regions from which such luxuries and surpluses came. The resulting constellation of overwhelmingly foreign goods and styles, placed within steppe practices and arenas, expressed the Mongolian steppe region and its polity as the cosmopolitan center of numerous economic and political networks and attempted to assert its authority within the steppes and over the surrounding realms.

Elevation of the Steppe Aristocracy

The dramatic changes in mortuary customs and material culture in the first century BC demonstrate the creation of more pronounced demonstrations of power and legitimacy. These altered and augmented expressions sought to reaffirm the authority of the eastern steppe polity and its ruling ranks through the materialized construction of imperial identity, in respect to peer political entities, within the Mongolian steppes and into new regions such as Tuva and the Western Altai. Modifications to mortuary traditions also established more distinct divisions in funerary rites between levels of the

¹¹⁷ Remnant grains have been found in some burials, like the large tombs at Noyon uul (Rudenko 1962), but there are also numerous mentions in the Chinese annals of grain and even root wine being sent north to the steppe leaders. Paeleobotanical research must be done on such remains to determine if they were grains that could have been grown in the steppes or would have been imported. The textual references will be discussed in detail in chapter five.

ruling élite. Burial elaboration through extravagant ceremonies, mortuary offerings, grave structure, and coffin ornamentation constructed a more tangible demonstration of cultural and social cohesion in the steppes, but the segments of élite society that could have orchestrated such change needed to simultaneously guard their own interests in these new social constructs and burgeoning systems of power. The ruling élite had to ensure their authority against competing groups outside of as well as within their élite ranks throughout the territories over which they attempted to exert control. Here, I would like to reiterate my reference to models of politics rather than typologies of politics.

I have suggested the word *élite* to broadly define those portions of society who attained or retained a discernible social status, manifested in the distinctly marked graves constructed for their deceased members of society. Quantitative and qualitative differences delimited several groups of élites in the steppes. The greatest differentiation came with the construction of the square mounded tombs, which, I will argue, signaled the attempts by an upper echelon of the steppe élite to restrict their ranks and maintain consistent authority in the steppe polity. These efforts are manifested, within the funerary arenas, in the placement of burials, investment in burial construction and furnishing elaboration, competitive levels of sacrificial offerings of wealth in ceremonies, and the display and demonstration of wealth through burial goods. From within the upper levels of this stratum of society, powerful factions that attempted to seize and maintain power by establishing institutionalized restrictions to their ranks couched within limitations according to lineage – thus constituting an *aristocracy* – became more distinguishable in the archaeological record through the construction of monumental memorials in tombs

and the lavish accumulation of wealth in exotic goods available through restricted economic and social channels.

Spatial Distinctions

The placing of the dead, in the greater landscape and within burial grounds, maps out their relationships to others in both the mortuary and living realms (Parker-Pearson 1999: 141). Many scholars have assumed mobile groups displayed no tendencies of territoriality and thus did not employ formal disposal areas for their deceased (Charles 1995). However, habitation patterns of mobile pastoralists usually entail a high degree of repetition (Cribb 1991; Simukov 1934a), and as such groups return to seasonal camps, they often retain continual burial grounds. Many of the circular grave sites were placed near slopes but within sight of the routes of either the tributary stream beds or the main river valley (Honeychurch and Amartuvshin 2007). The square tomb sites, on the other hand, were set within secluded areas out of sight of the river valleys and main thoroughfares. This contrasts starkly with the placement of the monumental stone mounds and khirigsuur complexes of the Bronze Age, which were constructed at key points in the landscape where they would be visible to all who passed through the area (Allard and Erdenebaatar 2005; Wright 2006). The square tomb cemeteries thus established separate sacred spaces for the interment of the more eminent members of society and their associates.

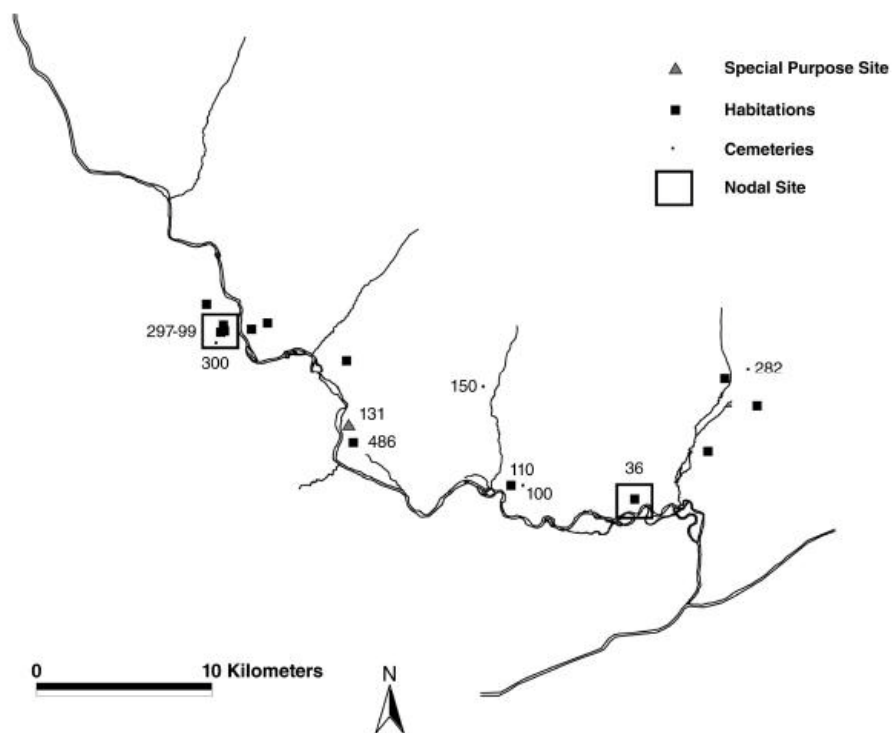


Fig.7.25 Egiin Gol valley circular graves cemeteries and associated Iron Age sites (Honeychurch and Amartuvshin 2007: 48) [Burhan tolgoi is no.100]

Surveys of valleys with Iron Age cemeteries have established a recurring pattern of a single large burial ground and numerous smaller clusters of graves scattered throughout the region (Honeychurch 2004; Williams 2008). The exact relationships between the collective groups interred at these various sites have yet to be fully investigated, but one might suppose, with the heavy imbalance of the singular large sites, especially in the case of square tomb cemeteries, that the separation of space denoted significant social as well as kinship distinctions. At Egiin Gol valley two of the smaller sites (nos.150 and 282) were set in the upper tributaries while the large cemetery of Burkhan tolgoi (no.100) was within the main route through the river valley and the key areas of habitation [Fig.7.25]. Square tomb cemeteries appear to have had the opposite

relationship with their surrounding burial grounds, and were often set within isolated niches of the landscape. Square tombs were not completely segregated from the circular graves, however, and these spatially exclusive burial sites often contained a large number of them. The two river valleys flanking the secluded upland of the Takhiltin khotgor cemetery have several small burial grounds of a handful of circular graves, or even single burials, yet circular graves also occur at the main site of square tombs [Figs.7.26, 6.60a].¹¹⁸

Some manner of social stipulation may have separated the circular graves within Takhiltin khotgor cemetery from those outside of the secluded space, but we cannot preclude kinship factors from the process of burial placement. Familial connections certainly played a role in burial placement within the cemeteries, as evidenced by the DNA research conducted on a large portion of the individuals interred at Burkhan tolgoi cemetery (Keyser-Tracqui et al. 2003). The three clusters analyzed in the cemetery correspond more or less to family groups [Fig.7.27]. This should not surprise us, since graves often express the identity and status of the family that inter the deceased rather than just an individual (Härke 1990; Stojanowski and Schillaci 2006), but it does not necessarily answer the questions of larger scale kinship determinants for burial placement or social distinction. The recurring pattern of micro- and macro-clustering at many of the cemeteries raises the question of levels of kin or social distinctions [Figs.6.50, 6.61, 7.28].

¹¹⁸ This overlap between the arenas of the circular and square burials has been discussed above, and will be further investigated below as a crucial intersection between these qualitatively separate categories of graves.

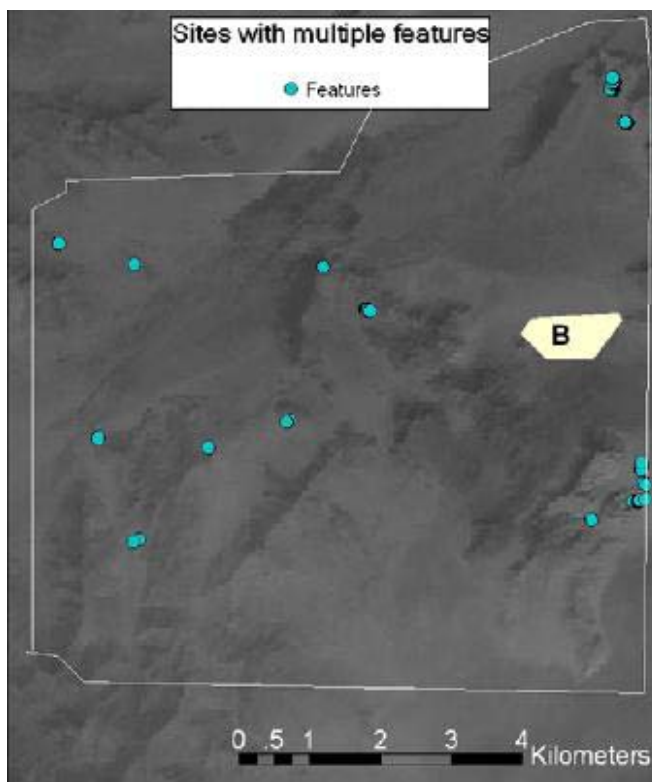


Fig.7.26 Circular grave sites in vicinity of Tahiltin hotgor cemetery [marked B] (Williams 2008: 46)

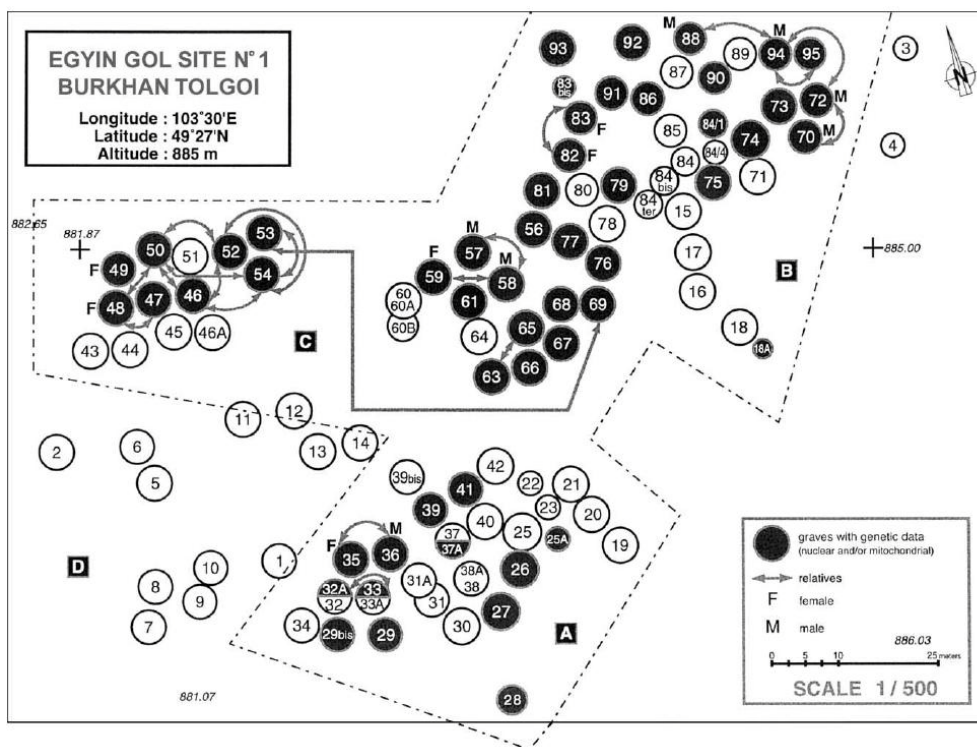


Fig.7.27 Map indicating Burhan tolgoi graves with genetic data analyzed (Keyser-Tracqui et al. 2003: 249)

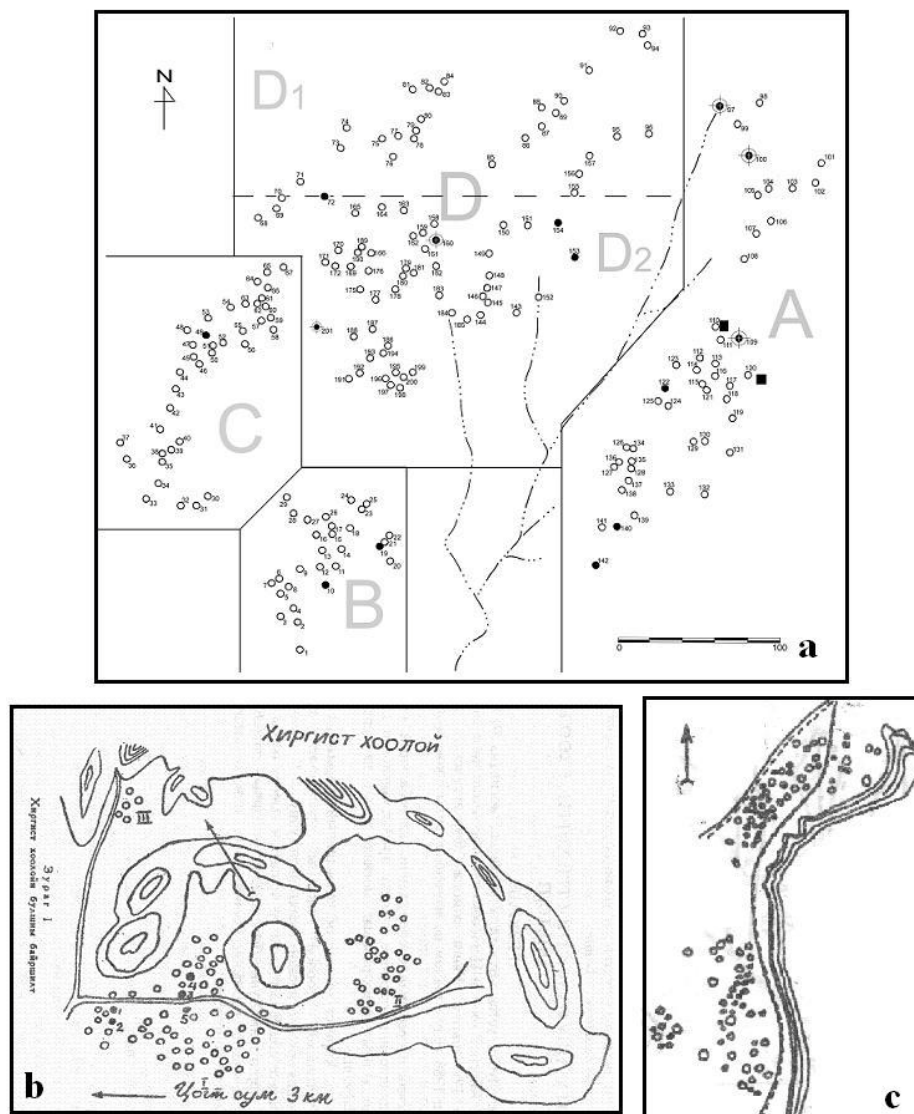


Fig.7.28 Circular grave burial grounds exhibiting clusters: (a) Tamiryn ulaan hoshoo, Arhangai (Khatanbaatar 2007: 163); (b) Hirgист hooloi, Gobi-Altai (Tseveendorj 1989); (c) Nuhtin am, Hovsgol (Tseveendorj 1989)

Falkenhausen's (2006) investigations of kinship relations in burial grounds of Bronze Age China address the issue of cemeteries for aristocratic lineages and clans, yet these are admittedly dependent upon the provision of lineage names, which are understood and well documented as such, inscribed on ritual vessels interred with the deceased and correlating with names mentioned in historical records. Some of the markings on animal

astragali interred in the steppe burials [Fig.6.34] as well as on the bottoms of vessels and the sides of bow plates have been interpreted as clan symbols (Erdenebaatar et al. 2002), but this collection of symbols is not yet well enough understood to equate it to a writing system (Davaatseren 2006), much less determine the meaning of particular symbols or equate them to clans or lineages.

Size and Spatial Distinctions

The size distributions reveal two size classes for the circular graves, and, perhaps, separate size classes for the square tombs, all of which could have, but not necessarily, qualified discrete groups in a social hierarchy. The distribution of circular graves clusters around a median of three to four meters diameter surface marker and within a mean range of three to seven meters [Fig.6.41]. The additional mode of ten to twelve meters lies outside this average range, and is considerable enough to constitute a separate size class. Honeychurch (2004: 160-162) calculated the distribution for the Burkhan tolgoi graves and found approximately the same ranges: 2-9m and 11-14m. He further discovered no significant difference between the smaller class of graves and the size range of graves in smaller sites within the greater Egiin Gol valley but outside of Burkhan tolgoi cemetery. A statistical study of all circular graves documented thus far more or less matches the size distribution in the Egiin Gol case study, and thus might corroborate the characterization of only two classes of circular graves. However, the circular graves found within square tomb cemeteries – both satellite burials of the tomb complexes and independent circular graves – expand the possible categories and social identities of those interred in the circular graves beyond two classes. Furthermore, they paint a more

complex picture of the relationship between those interred in circular graves and those interred in the square tombs. Social identities find expression in differences of size, style, and spatial context of the burials.

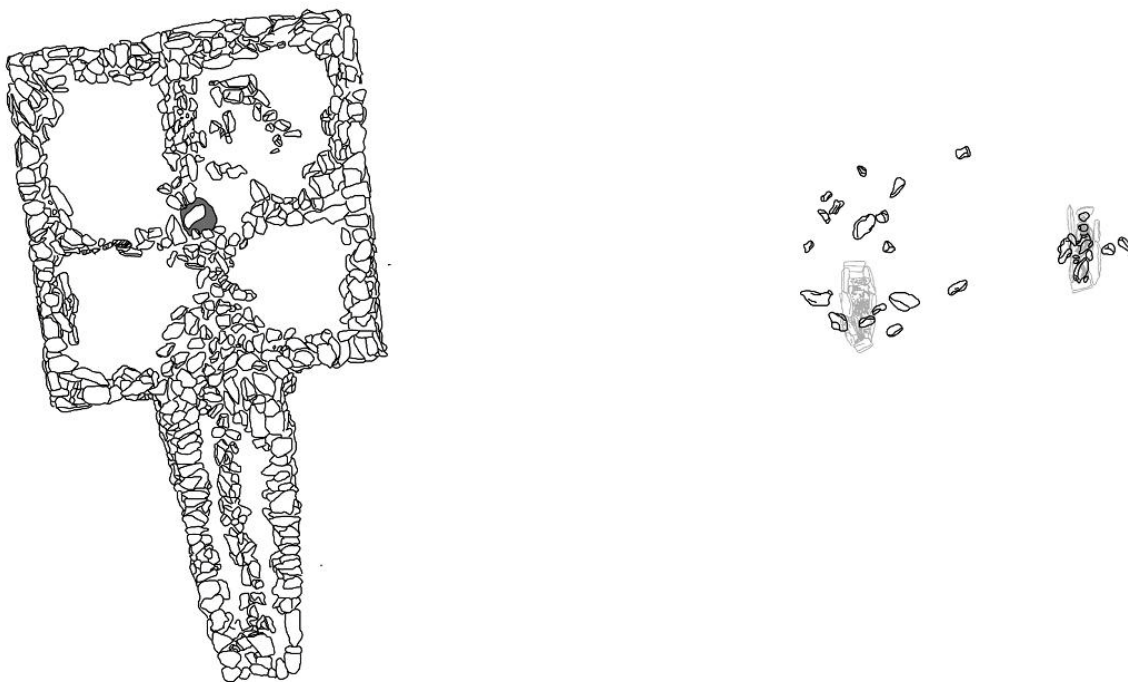


Fig.7.29 Tahiltin hotgor tomb 64 complex, satellite burials in context

The average square tomb is much larger than the average circular grave, but there is a noticeable overlap in size [Fig.7.30]. The range of circular grave size appears to cluster tightly around the mean size of five meters, but the possible second mode around ten meters [see Fig.6.41] challenges a simple understanding of the divisions between square and circular burials. This second size range of circular graves overlaps with much of the average range of square tombs. Furthermore, the lowest range of square tombs is equal to the median range of circular graves. An examination of the dimensions and style of the chamber for the larger circular graves versus the smaller square tombs also shows

an overlap. The chamber within the small eight meter wide square tomb at Takhiltin khotgor (THL-64) [Fig.6.60] is quite similar in size, form and style to some of the larger circular graves at Derestuy [Fig.6.45c]. In both cases, a wooden coffin with butterfly tenon construction is set within a slightly larger hewn log chamber and surrounded by a pit lining of stones. If we equate grave marker size, as well as chamber elaboration, to an expression of prestige, then within this significant overlap there may be the presence of elements of society which perhaps commanded a similar degree of social power, but did not hold the same social or political status. I would argue, then, that grave surface *style* as well as *size* was a means of distinguishing the deceased and those associated with the deceased. This may be an explanation for the presence of the radically different form of the square tombs – a means, through restricted style of burial, of one portion of the society to differentiate themselves from the others.

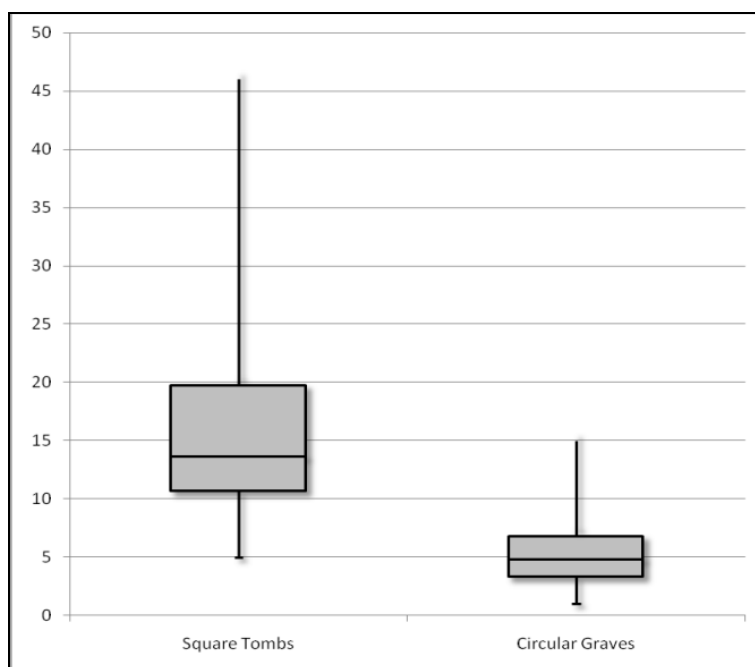


Fig.7.30 Comparative boxplot of the average sizes (in meters) of Square Tombs (length) and Circular Graves (diameter)

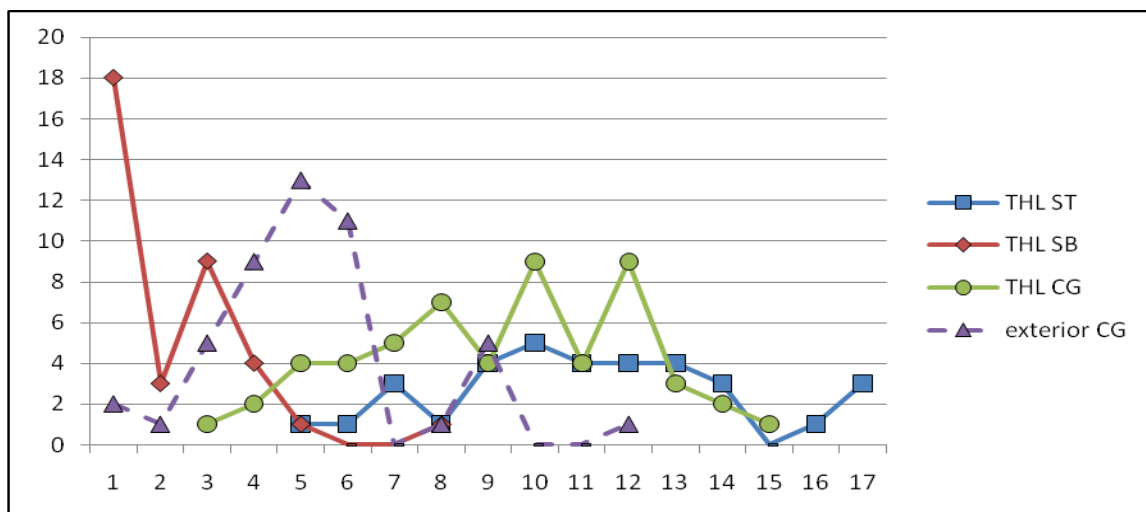


Fig.7.31A. Burials of Takhiltiin khotgor cemetery (THL) and in Takhilt area (Size in meters v. total count): square tombs (ST), satellite burials (SB), independent circular graves (CG)

In order to investigate the ways in which the mounded monumental burials and the more standard sort are spatially integrated or differentiated and physically contrasted, we can analyze the larger, centrally located Gol Mod 2 cemetery alongside the smaller, peripheral Takhiltin khotgor cemetery, and compare the elements within them [see Fig.6.52]. The model proposed by the survey of circular grave cemeteries at Egiin Gol delineates smaller sites with the smaller grave class and larger sites with mostly smaller graves and some larger graves (Honeychurch 2004). The greater Takhilt region presents a variant of this model, exhibiting several size categories of both circular graves (CG) and square tombs (ST) [Fig.7.31A]. Circular graves documented at sites exterior to and within the vicinity of the main square tombs site of Takhiltin khotgor cemetery (THL) range mostly between two to eight meters, matching the smaller size class purported by the Egiin Gol study as well as the description of such peripheral sites. However, this equivalent size class does not comprise the majority of circular graves in the main cemetery of the area, as it did at the Egiin Gol principal site of Burkhan tolgoi. Instead,

we see a prevalence of graves either smaller or larger than the typical mean range of circular graves. This bookended bimodal trend of circular graves within the main cemetery is likely a consequence of the focal site being much different than one such as Burkhan tolgoi, consisting of only circular graves. In order to understand more fully the circular graves within the square tomb sites, I have separated them into those which are satellites of the square tombs and those which are independent of the tomb complexes.

The independent circular graves (CG) exhibit an almost mirror image distribution to that of the standard spread of sizes for circular graves [Fig.6.41]. They are skewed heavily toward the higher end of the distribution and lumped over and past the range of the second mode of the normal distribution. The satellite burials (SB) cluster at the very low end of the usual size distribution, creating a combined distribution of non-square tombs which was lowest in the area of the normal median range. If we consider the graves marked by two or three meter diameter scatters of stones as most likely equivalent to the same as undisturbed clusters of one meter¹¹⁹, then the modality of the THL circular graves becomes even more stretched, skewing the first mode, the satellite burials, further toward to the low end. The size distribution of circular graves in sites outside the main burial ground match the regular distribution as well as that of the peripheral sites

¹¹⁹ The numerous satellite burials at sites such as Gol Mod 2 (Miller et al. 2006) and Takhiltin khotgor (Miller et al. 2008), are mostly graves with surface stone demarcations no bigger than two or three meters, though the heavy disturbance of many of their small surface markings prevent fine-tuned quantitative considerations. We may roughly adjust for this disturbance factor by considering again the example of tomb 64 complex at Takhiltin khotgor [Fig.7.28]. Judging by the unlooted satellite burials which had been marked by a small cluster of stones the size of the burial pit, we may propose that many of the smaller looted graves of the same paltry grave contents and furnishing (if any), had originally been marked with a similarly sized cluster of stones approximately a meter across. In the THL-64 complex, we see two identical satellite burials, one looted and the other not. The scattered surface stones of the looted grave cover a diameter of approximately three meters, a number thrice the size of its adjacent satellite burial, but not significantly larger in the spread of circular graves overall. We might therefore group together burials with a surface marker a few meters in diameter at the low end of the scale for analytical purposes.

documented at Egiin Gol. The key difference in the cemeteries of these two regional studies thus lies in the divergent nature of their main site. The high frequencies of both very small and larger graves point to a constraint on the amount of standard sized circular graves within the square tomb cemeteries, those which usually comprise the majority of burials. The sizes of independent circular graves range only slightly smaller than the square tombs, though the pits beneath the square mounds are much deeper than their ring marked counterparts. Nevertheless, a substantial overlap in size, much greater than in the overall distribution [Fig.7.30], occurs at the site of Takhiltin khotgor.

The centrally located and larger scale cemetery of Gol Mod 2 exhibits a more exaggerated pattern of relationships between the different burial types [Fig.7.31B].¹²⁰ Like Takhiltin khotgor, there are fewer circular graves of the standard median size (2-9m). The independent circular graves at Gol Mod 2 equate to the larger size class of the standard distribution, but with an added number of graves at the more extreme levels. The satellite burials exhibit the same average size range as at Takhiltin khotgor, but also include graves of much larger proportions, thus overlapping more with the size range of independent circular graves. The greatest differences, however, lie in the related elements of tomb complexes – square tombs and satellite burials. The square tombs at Gol Mod 2 reach significantly larger sizes and are accompanied by many more satellite burials than at Takhiltin khotgor. Both cemeteries incorporate a similar size distribution of square

¹²⁰ Over the course of several years (2001-2005), surveys of the main river valley of Khanuy, of which the stream by Gold Mod 2 is a tributary, found no other Iron Age cemeteries. Only a handful of graves nearby the site of Gol Mod 2 were found. However, recent surface surveys and test pits in Khanuy valley have found habitation evidence for a significant presence during the Iron Age, including slag from iron smelting (personal communication, Jean-Luc Houle).

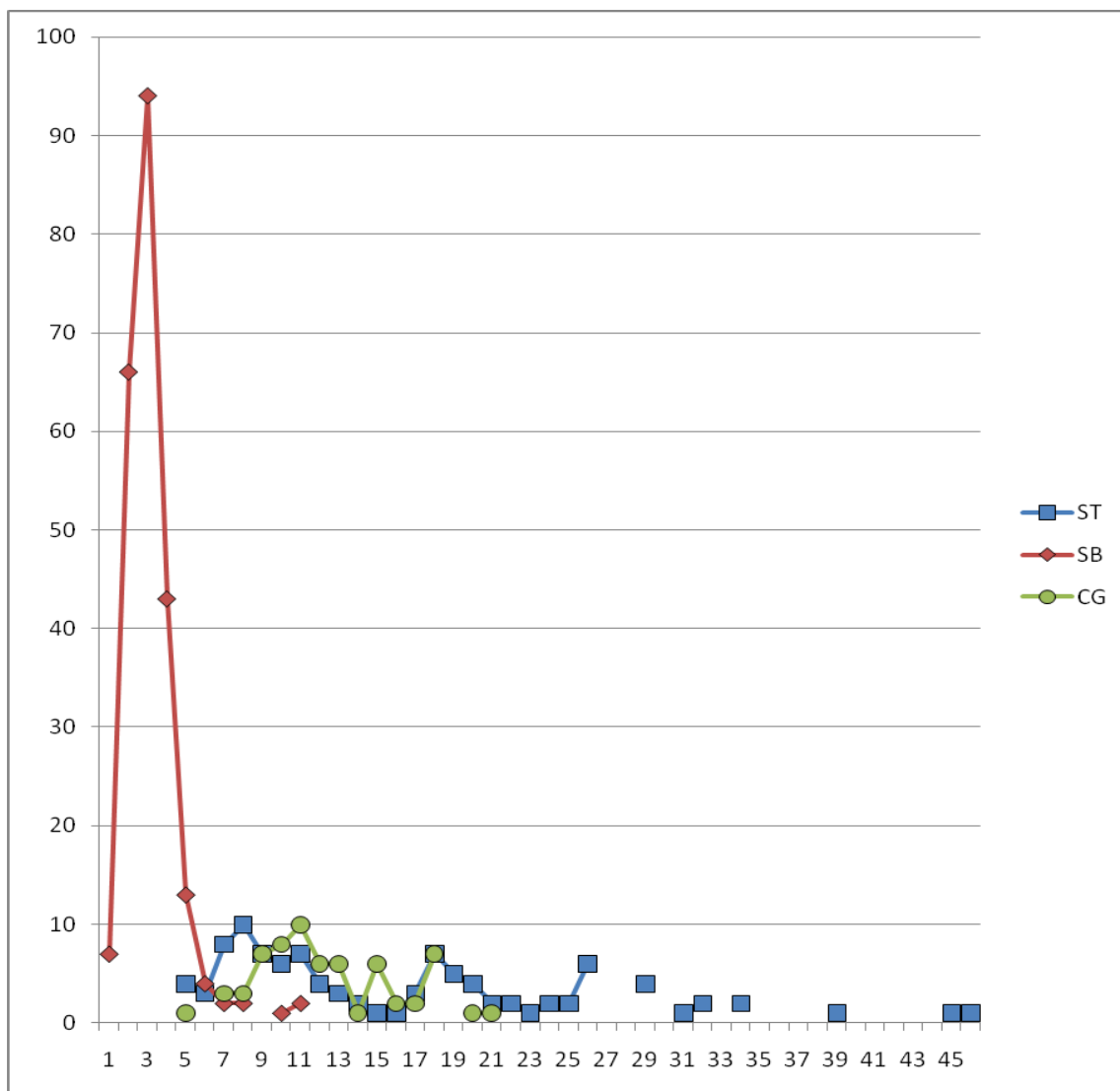


Fig.7.31B Burials of Gol Mod 2 cemetery (size in meters v. total count) square tombs (ST), satellite burials (SB), independent circular graves (CG)

tombs, between five and twenty-five meters, but Gol Mod 2 includes an additional range of massive tombs on par with, if not greater than, the other square tomb burial grounds in Central Mongolia [Fig.6.62]. The components of tomb complexes constitute a significantly larger portion of the interments at Gol Mod 2 than at Takhiltin khotgor – where there appears to exist a balance between singular circular graves and graves of the tomb complexes – and there is a noticeable positive relationship between the size of the

square tombs and the number of satellite burials flanking them [Fig.7.33]. Thus, as the tomb complexes of the élite appeared more grandiose and dominant at these burial grounds, the square tomb sizes and satellite burial numbers mirrored each other in growth. In sum, the steppe burials of the first century BC to first century AD may be classified according to form and size. The qualitative aspect of form includes two types – square tombs and circular graves – the latter of which may possibly consist of two subtypes. The category of circular graves has been treated as a single type throughout the discussion thus far, mainly because of the similarities in grave pit and furnishing for the burials marked with all sizes of surface markers. However, the smallest of these burials with round demarcations do not completely resemble a circle of stones but rather an oval cluster of stones the size of the burial pit beneath the demarcation. The recognition of such markers as a distinct form has only come with recent excavations (Miller et al. 2008, 2009) which show these small burials occurring at square tombs sites as part of the tomb complexes (e.g. Takhiltin khotgor) as well as circular grave sites (e.g. Shombuuziin belchir). It is not simply the size of their surface markers but their recurrent context within tomb complexes that intimates them as a separate group. However, since surface disturbance makes the discrimination of cluster versus small circle difficult, I will continue to consider them a possible subtype within the category of circular graves.

The quantitative distinctions of size yield two size classes for the circular graves, the first of which is the definitive median – approximately two to nine meters (class i)¹²¹ and ten to fifteen meters (class ii) [Fig.6.41]. The square tombs, as presented in the

¹²¹ I do not quantitatively define the smaller stone cluster marked burials of one to two meters as a separate size class, but rather the lowest end of the first size class.

previous chapter, have two definite median size classes with two additional modes [Fig.6.53]. The first two size classes (i, ii) parallel those of the circular graves, while the third mode of size class (iii: 20-25m) and noticeable fourth group (iv: 30m or more) extend far beyond the size, and thus energy expenditure in tomb construction, of the circular graves. The broad intersection of size ranges for circular graves and square tombs mentioned above demonstrates an overlap in funerary expenditure, and this appears matched by the investments in grave furnishings for the intersecting range.

	Total	Mean size			Number (and percentage)			# Number of SB per ST	ST size v. number of SB per ST
		ST	SB	CG	ST	SB	CG		
THL	133	11.50	2.41	9.52	36 (27%)	40 (30%)	57 (43%)	1.09 (2.18)*	$r^2=0.0966$
GM2	262	17.80	3.70	10.50	98 (37%)	128 (49%)	36 (14%)	1.87 (4.85)*	$r^2=0.3943$

Fig.7.32 Statistics for square tombs (ST), satellite burials (SB), and independent circular graves (CG) at Takhiltin khotgor (THL) and Gol Mod 2 (GM2) (size in meters)

* These calculations included those tombs which did not have any satellite burials. The average number of satellite burials only among those square tombs which *do* have these features is given in the parentheses, though there also are significant outliers (see Fig.6.61).

However, the lack of any significant correlation between the quantitative variables of burial investment – surface marker, pit depth, and chamber size [Figs.6.41, 6.42] – does not support the presence of a multi-faceted set of criteria for an institutionalized hierarchy of funerary rites. The variables exhibit a general tendency towards increased investment as one feature increases, but this pattern may be attributed to a trend of competitive investment where each interment incident relies on a different combination of burial elaborations to express wealth or social status. There was indeed a formalized mortuary “vocabulary,” but not a strictly stipulated set of sumptuary rules or

hierarchy of features, that is, beyond the surface demarcation. This allowed for such collectively competitive expressions within the main size classes as would challenge those in higher social or political standing.

Large circular graves (class two) placed in square tomb cemeteries, such as the graves at Takhiltin khotgor which equate to the size range of the square tombs there, could represent relatively high members of the steppe élite attempting to participate in the realms of even more powerful members of society, represented by the apparently restricted square tombs. On the other hand, these smaller square tombs (also class two) could be an attempt by similar factions to emulate the burial customs established by the upper most echelons, imitating the new form of burial but not possessing the ability to invest the same amount of labor and wealth seen in the larger square tombs. It is plausible that in both square and circular burial types the post-median subsequent modes represent distinct ranks in their quantitative differences. More importantly, despite the spatial and size overlap, a conscious bifurcation of burial style occurred in the funerary traditions. The uppermost echelon of the steppe élite had clearly established a new tradition which would separate them from the other competing groups.

The distribution of documented sites shows size classes of (I) a few burials (ten or less), (II) a few dozen burials, and (III) a larger group of a hundred or more, upwards of four hundred [Fig.6.49]. The first mode represents the largest percentage, but considering the results of regional surveys, this proportion is probably much higher, as these sites correspond to numerous small burial plots, grossly underrepresented in the present collection of documented sites, within the vicinity of larger main sites of specific regions seen in the II and III class sites. It seems no coincidence that the largest cemeteries (III),

and largest burials (iii, iv), occur within the area of highest site density, which spreads across central Mongolia and the southern regions of Lake Baikal. For this reason, we may speak of a core region of occupation as well as a core social group of the steppe polity.

Burial Elaboration

I return now to the square tombs as an added dimension of funerary distinction and burial elaboration. The square tombs were far deeper than the circular graves, which ranged between two to three meters deep with only a few rare examples of four, five or six meters deep. The smallest square tomb yet excavated, Takhiltin khotgor 64, measured eight meters on the side and reached six meters deep (Miller et al. 2008). The handful of other square tombs excavated, which measure between fifteen to thirty meters along the side walls, range between ten to eighteen meters deep (Konovalov 2008; Minyaev and Sakharovskaya 2007; Mission 2003; Navaan 1999; Rudenko 1961; Tseveendorj et al. 2007). These tombs were significantly more costly in the process of digging the pit and for constructing the mound overtop. The deeper pits and more complex surface demarcations probably meant longer and more complex ritualized community activities, especially for the larger square tombs that would have required considerable crews far beyond the standard collection of familial participants needed for the interment of someone in a standard circular grave.

We should also recognize grave digging as a ritual in its own right (Williams 2006: 118), which for the square tombs would have called upon the labor and ritual participation of a large assembly of people. The square tombs thus embody the ability to call upon such grand assemblies to memorialize an individual. Monumental tombs have

the added effect of providing a focus for repeated acts of commemoration (Williams 2006:150), and the stone lines with consecutive deposits of burnt animal bones to the north of the mounds may represent such evidence of repeated rites (Bayarsaikhan and Miller 2007). The stone lines would have allowed for continued elaboration of the burial plot through the addition of offerings without reopening the tomb.

Very little difference occurred in size for the coffins of both square tombs and circular graves, since they were mostly made to fit the body. Simple square tenons were used in some of the coffins with extended walls seen at Derestuy, though this was not pervasive in such single coffin furnishings. The more complex tenon-mortis manner of coffin construction may have served as a qualitative distinction, but, due to the craftsmanship required, could also have been one effort of elaboration in a quantitative scale of increased investment. Further elaboration and investment was expressed in the decoration of the coffins with quatrefoil motifs in the lattice pattern, which was often accompanied by silk wrapping beneath and silk streamers overtop. The addition of outer coffers may also be seen as a qualitative and quantitative distinction, presenting conspicuous supplements to the area for disposing the body as well as an increased investment in wood and craftsmanship invested in the grave. Wood, especially in drier more barren regions – as is the case for Takhiltin khotgor, Shombuuzin belchir, and Hirgist hooloi – then becomes a qualitative difference from other graves. The use of wood, as well as the lattice and quatrefoil decoration, in the square tombs and larger circular graves of the greater Gobi and Mongolian Altai areas marks a significant adherence to these means of burial elaboration [Fig.7.33]. This associated the ruling élite in those areas directly with the traditions of the core groups in central Mongolia and

provided them with the means of distinguishing themselves from other leaders in their respective areas.

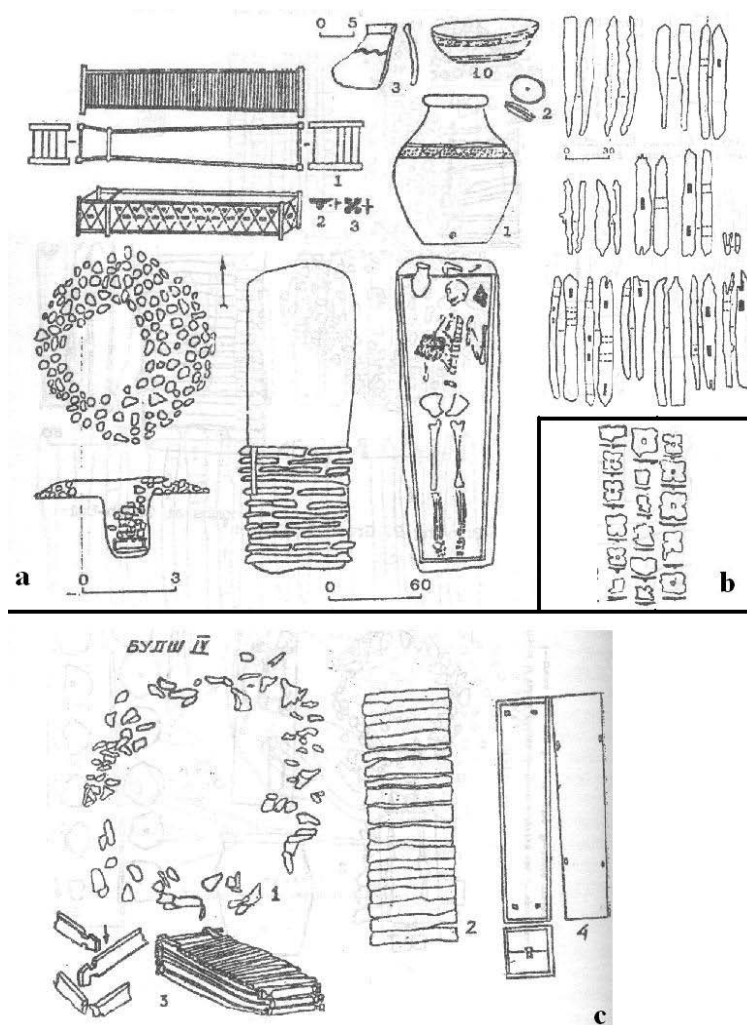


Fig.7.33 Burial furnishing elaboration in the Gobi and Altai regions: (a) Tevsh uul grave 20; (b) Tevsh uul grave 1 iron coffin ornamentation (a,b: Tseveendorj 2000); (c) Khirgist khooloi grave 4 notched log chamber and wooden coffin with butterfly tenons (Tseveendorj 1989)

Burial Offerings

Funerary offerings affirm connections between the living bestower and the deceased, and thereby indirectly between different living members of society. They are also a demonstration of wealth, or more specifically, of the ability of the living bestower

to sacrifice a portion of their assets on behalf of the deceased, thereby expressing their wealth and prestige to the other living participants or witnesses of the mortuary ceremonies. The action of offering may thus in some part be defined as the giving up of materials for a specific social gain. Since offerings are also intertwined with religious meanings and proscriptions, it is impractical to reconstruct exact herd compositions of the pastoral groups from the proportions of animals offered to the deceased (Hanks 2002). Neither can we practically reconstruct economic herd usage from the animal offerings. Culling patterns of animal offerings in ritual usually do not reflect optimal use of a herd because the sacrifice of these animals often incorporates the killing specifically of a valued animal (Russell 1999: 154). It is the removal of something valued from the whole that qualifies the degree of sacrifice being made from one's property. Animals not often killed, such as horses, or animals of a certain age or in a certain amount may be sacrificed during the interment or other mortuary rituals.

Separate spaces in the burials may reflect separate stages of activity – goods related to the *disposal rites* of the deceased and the *funerary rites* performed by the living (Flad 2002) – or separate meanings and functions of otherwise similar materials interred in those spaces – such as the functions of items for *consumption* by the dead and *accompaniment* with the dead (Miller 2008). Grave 100 at Ivolga contains the remains of sheep/goat in separate places [Fig.6.37]. A skull is set outside the coffin, while ribs and vertebrae are set inside the coffin along with three pots. A clearer separation of spaces and nature of offerings can be seen in tomb complex 64 at Takhiltin khotgor [Fig.7.34]. Cattle ribs and vertebrae are set within the wooden chamber, beside a pair of bone chopsticks, a painted tray, a large grain pot, and an iron ladle. Since the vertebrae were

found perfectly articulated, one can assume that upon their placement in the tomb the meat on them had not yet been consumed, symbolically leaving the meat for consumption by the deceased. The skulls, sacra, tail bones, and lower legs of one horse and three horned-sheep/goats were placed in a niche outside the chamber furnishings. I would argue that these remains, like the sheep/goat skull placed outside the coffin of Ivolga grave 100, retained a different meaning or function according to their placement in a sphere separate from the other animal bones and items related to consumables. One might further argue that this difference in their intended functions within the burial, despite the stages of ceremony they went through before interment with the deceased, correspond to the consumption of cuts of meat from the ribs and vertebrae, along with the contents of the adjacent vessels, and the accompaniment of wealth in the form of herd animals, represented by the heads and extremities, offered by the living during the funeral. Another illustration of animal offerings outside the immediate vicinity of the deceased can be found in the burnt crushed animal bones deposited in the parallel stone lines north of some of the tomb complexes. These most assuredly represent offerings given by the living during rituals outside of the disposal rites, and, since they lie outside of the burial pit, could have represented mortuary offerings well after or well before the interment ceremony.

We may reflect here upon Flad (2002)'s assertion that the amount of funerary offerings placed outside the immediate vicinity of the deceased – the *ceremonial goods* – often do not correlate to the goods more directly associated with the deceased. Furthermore, determinants of the funerary offerings were not related directly to the status or identity of the deceased but to rather to the competitive expressions of wealth and

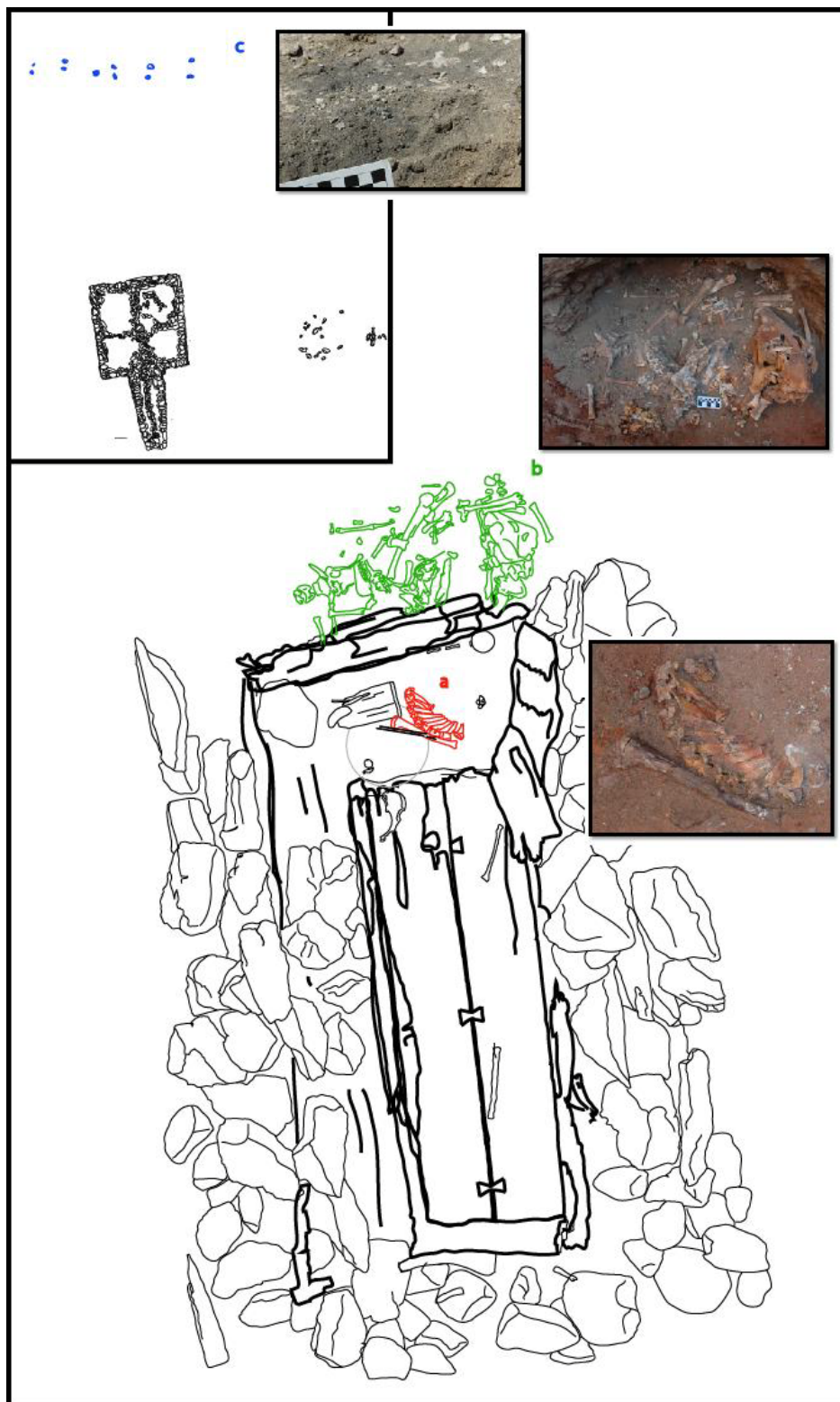


Fig.7.34 Takhiltin khotgor tomb 64 animal offerings: (a) cattle ribs and vertebrae; (b) skulls, sacra, tail bones, and lower legs of one horse and three horned-sheep/goats; (c) burnt crushed animal bones (after Miller et al. 2008)

prestige by the living bestowers of offerings. A distinct difference can be demonstrated with the burials at Il'movaya pad' (Konovalov 1976). Despite the same amount of furnishing and approximately the same dimensions, the graves shown in Fig.7.35 contained a vastly different number of animals offered to the deceased. Graves 45 and 58 each had only a few animals, while graves 46 and 52 contained the remains of ten and twenty animals, respectively. The animal offerings in grave 53 far outweighed the other burials, consisting of a dog skeleton, skulls and phalanges of three sheep/goat, and the remains of at least thirty-two large mammals – horse or cattle sacra in the antechamber with additional mandible fragments in the looters' hole.

No significant correlation exists between the size or furnishing investments in these burials and the animals offered to their occupants, and a similar discrepancy exists between the size of square tombs and the number of stone lines, if any, found north of their mounded structures at Takhiltin khotgor and Gol Mod 2.¹²² Neither the stone lines with burnt animal remains nor the animal offerings of skulls and extremities found within the peripheral sections of the grave pits concord with patterns of burial structure investment that might attest to the social standing of the deceased. We should therefore consider these remains as evidence not of the disposal rites but of the funerary rites (Flad 2002), and investigate them as manifestations of ritualized competitive actions performed by the living within the mortuary arena. Funerals provided living participants with the opportunities to demonstrate their wealth and prestige through the amounts of capital they sacrificed on behalf of the deceased. The majority of this wealth appears to have been in

¹²² Single stone lines were also found adjacent to several of the larger burials in circular grave cemeteries of Khovd province surveyed in 2006, including a few at Shombuuzin belchir.

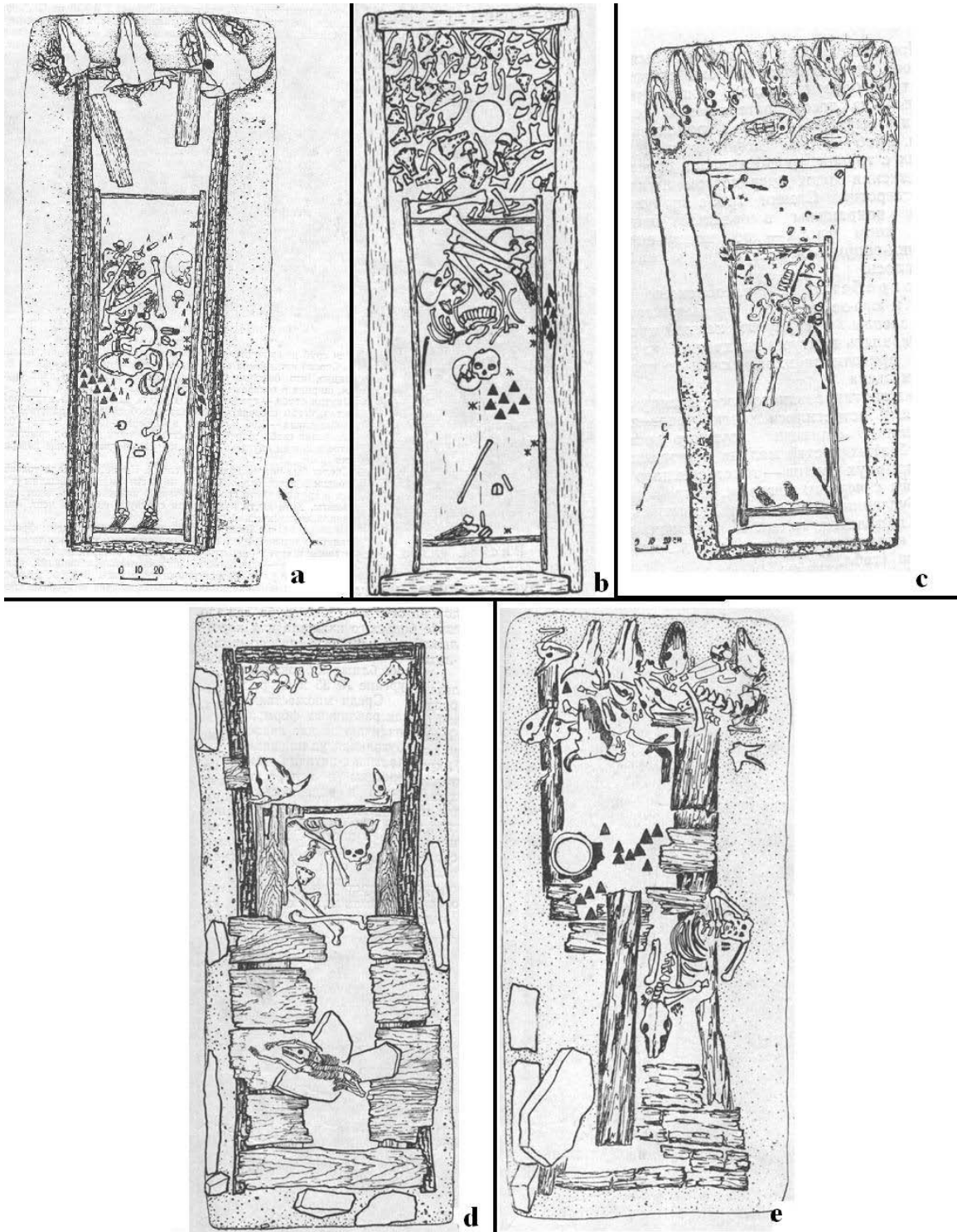


Fig.7.35 Animal offerings at Il'movaya pad', Buryatia: graves (a) 45, (b) 53, (c) 52, (d) 46, (e) 58
(Konovalov 1976: 31, 62, 56, 35, 77)

the form of domestic animals – the herds of the mobile pastoralists. I have emphasized previously that the significance of sacrifice may be distinguished quantitatively, as demonstration of surplus, or qualitatively, as demonstration of noteworthy ability to procure. Wild animals were almost never included in the graves, and no animals that could qualify as rare in the steppes have yet been found. The emphasis in these graves seemed to be the demonstration of stored surplus in the form of herds.

In addition to the ritual practitioners and ranks of participants, gatherings of people at funerals may have included “those who followed in death.” Besides offering up their own wealth, some participants may also have offered up their lives, possibly obligated to do so, or been offered up by others for the symbolic accompaniment to or consumption by the deceased. The phenomenon of satellite burials at numerous cemeteries has been attributed to the practice of human sacrifice. But before we critique this possibility, we must recognize the textual origins of this notion that is so frequently entertained. One short passage regarding Xiongnu mortuary practices exists in the Chinese records:

其送死,有棺槨金銀衣裘,而無封樹喪服;近幸臣妾從死者,多至數千百人。
When sending off their dead, they have inner and outer coffins, gold and silver, clothing and furs, though they do not have mounds built, structures erected, or mourning garments. The close and favored male and female attendants who follow the deceased [to the grave] number as many as several thousands or hundreds of people. [*Shiji* 110: 2892]

Minyaev (1998) asserts evidence for sacrifice in the graves at Derestuy, citing the absence of hands and feet, but the only instance of violent death observed in human remains is on the skull of the man buried in the central grave of a complex with four

surrounding graves of sub-adults [Fig.7.36].¹²³ The excavators of grave 33 at Burkhan tolgoi [Fig.7.37] propose that a hyoid bone found within a box in the antechamber of the man's coffin belonged to the woman placed in a side niche to his right and provides evidence that she was sacrificed to follow him in death (Murail et al. 2000). The problem inherent in each of these arguments is the assumption that evidence for sacrifice can and should be visible on human remains. There are, unfortunately, many ways to execute a person without leaving any traces on the bones. If we are indeed determined to find evidence of human sacrifice, then we might also look at burial structure and derived order of interments. The four small burials surrounding grave 44 at Derestuy show no aspects that dictate they must have been interred at the same time or concurrent with the man in the central grave. They could have been interred any time after or before, given both the likelihood that these children were offspring of the adult male and the custom of familial clusters documented by the DNA research at Burkhan tolgoi (Keyser-Tracqui et al. 2003). For grave 33 at Burkhan tolgoi, the placement of the woman in a niche to the side of the pit shaft implies that she was possibly interred at the same time as the man in the main coffin before sealing the burial pit.

The main focus of the sacrificial burial discussions, however, remains the satellite burials of the square tomb complexes (cf. Minyaev and Sakharovskaya 2002). The satellite graves are often set in lines of abutting burials, but the burial plots could theoretically have been preselected and filled in before or after the death of the square

¹²³ Mention is given to missing hands and feet as evidence of bodily desecration in the process of sacrifice, but there is no mention of cuts marks to prove such removal. Furthermore, these extremities are often the first parts to drop off in the case of secondary burials, i.e. individuals (re)processed after death yet interred in the present burial much later.

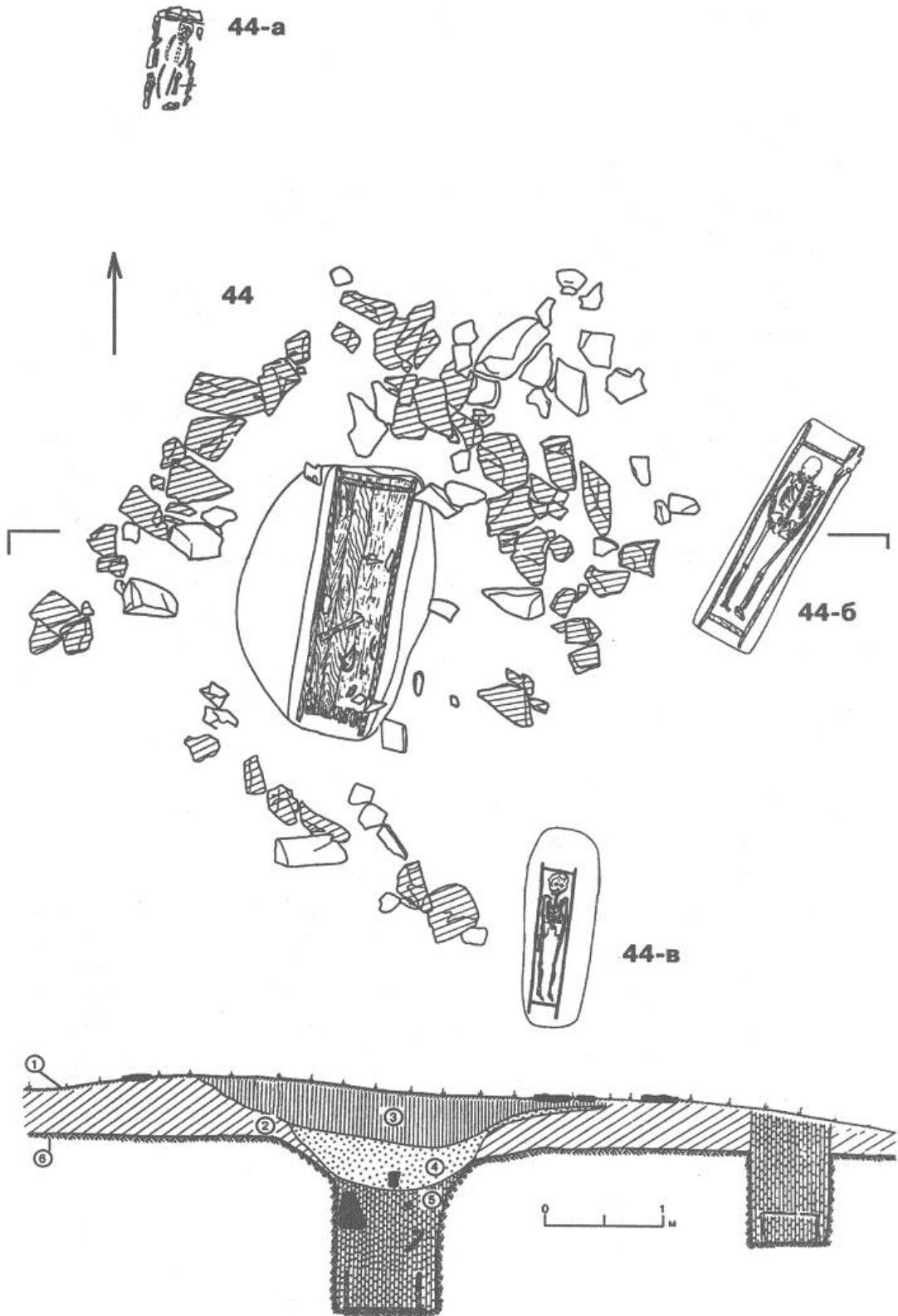


Fig.7.36 Derestuy burial 44 complex (Minyaev 1998: fig.22)

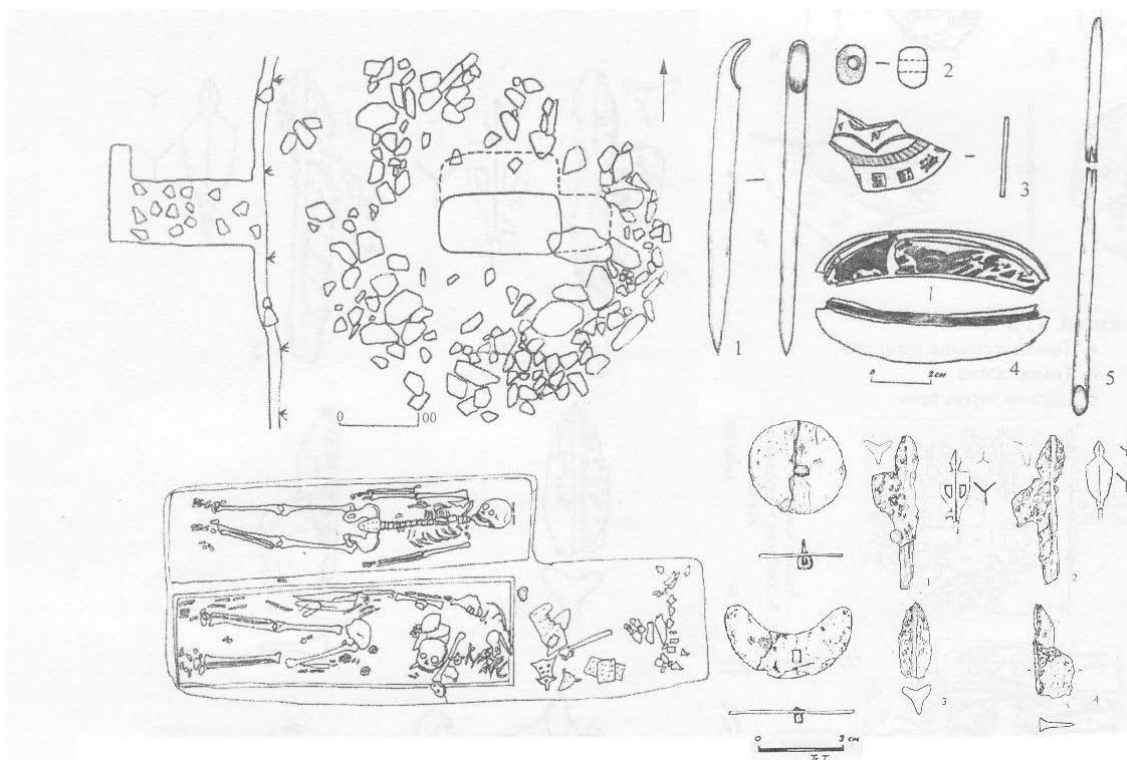


Fig.7.37 Burkhan tolgoi grave 33 (Torbat et al. 2003: 203-204)

tomb occupant. Two questions persist in this discussion: were the occupants of the satellite burials interred at the same time as the deceased in the central barrow, and do the satellite burials constitute a single interment incident? The first question is extremely difficult to answer, but the structure of some tomb complexes may allow us to posit explanations for the second inquiry.

The arc of burials adjacent to tomb 1 complex at Gol Mod 2 [Fig.6.58] provides the most convincing evidence for a single incident of multiple interments (Miller et al. 2006). Here, a long line of twenty-seven abutting burials exhibits not only symmetry in the placement of the surface markers, but also in the coffins beneath the surface. The graves are all oriented more or less north, as is typical for such graves, but the

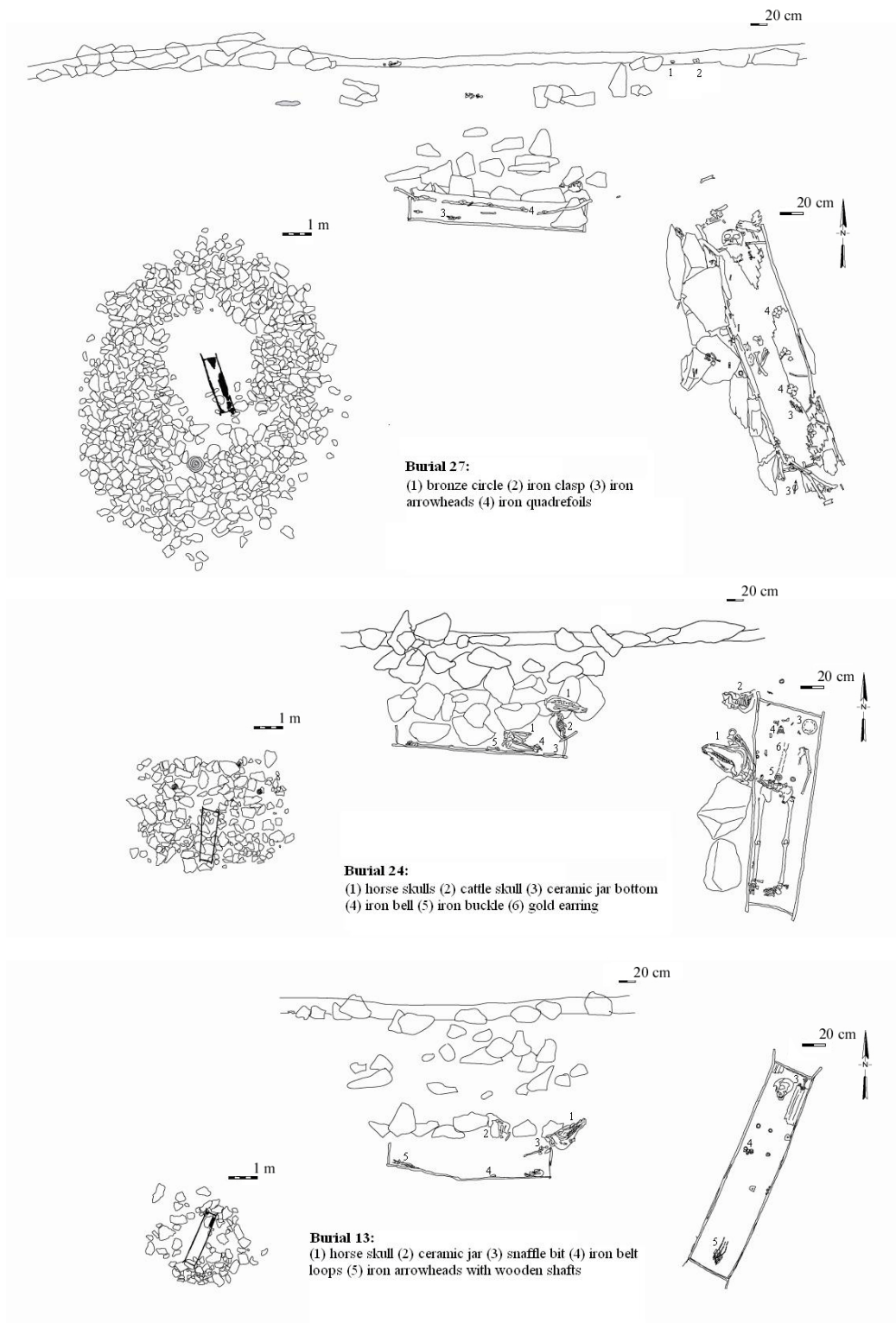


Fig.7.38 Satellite burials of tomb 1 complex, Gol Mod 2 (Miller et al. 2006: 7)

orientations of the coffins follow the line of the arc. Orientation begins at northeast with the southernmost coffin located south of the end of the ramp, progresses toward true north in the coffins directly east of the central tomb, and shifts toward northwest in the northernmost coffin, which lies just north of the square tomb north wall. With a few exceptions, the coffins themselves also line up in a continual arc. It is possible to line up the grave markers from the surface, even after some individuals have been interred, but it is very likely that all coffins were viewed simultaneously in order to have these furnishings at the bottom of deep pits all line up. This degree of symmetry above as well as beneath the ground provides strong but not irrefutable evidence for single interment, and thus sacrificial, mortuary practices. While the satellite graves for this tomb complex seemingly fall within the category of simultaneous, and thus possibly sacrificial, burials, we should not assume that all satellite burials constitute the practice of sacrifice.

Returning to the textual origins of this discussion, we must recognize the chronological disparity between the writing of the passage mentioned above (late 2nd to early 1st century BC) and the phenomenon of the square tombs and their satellite burials (late 1st century BC to 1st century AD). The satellite burials seen in the square tomb complexes could be a continuation of an earlier tradition of human sacrifice, as mentioned in the account originating at least a hundred years prior, but there is so far no evidence in the archaeological record for such practices during earlier periods in the steppes. It could also be that satellite burials, coming from an earlier tradition like the kinship clusters or the possible familial group in complex 44 at Derestuy, did not contain sacrificial victims. The sacrifice of humans connotes power exercised by the ruling

bodies interred in tombs which have such accompanying graves (Parker-Pearson 1999: 166), and if only certain tombs were accompanied by sacrifices while other were not, then this would make those satellite burials which were sacrificial in nature all the more significant. It is plausible that only those élite with a certain degree of prestige and political power could demand such a practice in their honor.

The question also remains as to the identity of the individuals interred in such graves. The presence of many sub-adults in the satellite burials echoes the custom in circular grave cemeteries, like Derestuy, and could denote a practice of burying children beside their parents or senior relatives. While most of the satellite burials are lesser graves with small surface markers, some are rather large and even contain distinct features of graves of the higher élite. Many of the satellite graves at the northern end of the burial arc for tomb 1 complex at Gol Mod 2 [Fig.6.58] are much larger than the average five meter diameter circular grave. Burials 21 and 27 have six and eight meter diameter surface markers, both had iron lattice and quatrefoil decoration on wooden coffins [Fig.7.38], and burial 21 had an additional wooden coffer around the inner wooden coffin. These and other such satellite burials surpass the size and complexity of most circular graves, but the most significant characteristic of the satellite burials is their adjunct and subsidiary position within a focused mortuary complex of a larger mounded tomb.

Whether they followed the death of the main tomb occupant immediately (i.e. sacrificed) or anytime thereafter, it is important to note that their identities in death were inexorably tied to, and probably subservient to, the deceased in the central barrow. This in itself is a manifestation of the power of those connected to the deceased in the main

tomb over those in society who became subsumed by the deceased for whom the larger complex was constructed, whether through their interment within its grounds or by connection to those who were interred in the accompanying graves. This practice presented another measure for demonstrating power and asserting authority.

Burial Goods

Items interred with the deceased, even those deemed personal trappings, have a social life (Appadurai 1986) before their deposit in the ground, and their meanings and uses are often bound up in economic transactions or social interactions (Lesure 1999; Parker-Pearson 1999; Wason 1994). This can relate to gifting to the deceased during the funeral ceremonies (i.e. “offering”), as well as gifts received throughout one’s life and the gifting phases through which a single object progresses. The treatment during interment ceremonies and placement in the grave are the final stages of the corporeal “life” of an object, but it carries with it the paths it took to arrive at this final theater of action. Variables surrounding the first stage of an object’s life (i.e. the creation of the object) concern most studies, which present relative scales of luxuriance or simplicity for personal trappings and offered goods in order to understand social roles and relations. Particularities of cultural value systems and social proscriptions on distribution and consumption also elucidate the significance of objects in reconstructing social systems. Degrees of alienation (Lesure 1999) become arguably more controllable with alien goods. In addition to gradations of value according to the raw materials and amount of labor put into the creation of objects, the foreign quality and complex social life of transference, as

well as use and deposition, for many of the goods found in the steppe graves add significantly to our understanding of the social institutions and networks.

Belt ornamentation in the steppe consisted of a broad variety of decorative pieces, including ostentatious and monstrous pieces [Figs.6.34f, 7.5] as well as simple iron clasps, but even the more elaborate pieces exhibited a trend toward mass production. Instead of whole ornaments of cast bronze, gold, or silver, there grew, perhaps out of the tradition of pressed foil ornaments, a preponderance of iron artifacts with thin precious metal coverings. Some of these artifacts, such as the silver covered unicorn decorations (Yeruul-Erdene 2007), the bronze coated coffin handles (André and Yeruul-Erdene 2004), and the leaf-motif gilded plaque (National Museum of Korea 2008) appear quite ornate in style. Others, by their lesser quality and wider distribution, indicate a broader circulation of precious metals for adornment with more localized manufacture. The production technique for many of the iron garment fittings consisted of thin gold sheets adhered to the iron facing using a pricking method to stick the foil to the adhesive. The example of the gold covered iron clasp from grave 15 at Shombuuziin belchir [Fig.6.35d] shows the application of three separate sheets of gold foil to cover the belt piece. Such gold sheets may have been distributed for localized, even household level, efforts to embellish personal trappings. Personal ornamentation for the higher élites was clearly more opulent and exotic in the face of this wide adoption of easily constructed ornaments which had the appearance of precious metal prestige goods. Beads of rare and foreign sourcing continued to be found in the graves as they had in previous centuries (Davydova 1996; Minyaev 1998), but the addition of lavish inlaid jewelry [Figs.7.3,4] attested to the increase in foreign styles and foreign imports.

Chinese mirrors would also have been prestigious possessions, though it is nearly impossible to say how, if at all, they were used by the steppe people.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, their ownership could have expressed either the direct possession of wealth, through the dispersal of capital, or connections to it, by utilizing the extended economic or social networks required to procure such an artifact. Though Chinese mirrors are not numerous, their broad distribution leaves no indication of sumptuary rules or a high degree of alienability. Chinese chariots, as evidenced by their exclusive appearance in square tombs, most likely did adhere to particular sumptuary regulations. They were probably the vehicles of individual rulers or local leaders, used in tours or ritual processions to distinguish them from their accompanying brigades of steppe élite. The associated silvered bridle ornaments found in several of the square tombs appear equally as exclusive and were probably part of a combined assemblage of exotic accoutrements for transporting the ruling aristocracy.



Fig.7.39 Flakes of lacquered vessel, Shombuuzin belchir grave 15 (Miller et al. 2009)

As outlined above, the steppe élite did not appear to have incorporated any of the Chinese ritual vessels or standard storage vessels into their burial assemblages. They did, however, adopt banqueting accoutrements, such as bronze basins and spouted pots

¹²⁴ Since mirrors occur in male, female, and child burials, and there is no contemporary treatise or other form of literature regarding the meaning and function of mirrors in the steppes, it is difficult to get at the exact meaning and function (Rubinson 2002).

(Desroches and André 2007; Navaan 1999; Umehara 1960). These exotic pieces of equipment were limited to the square tombs, but steppe style bronze and iron cauldrons were found in circular graves as well. Both constitute equipment for hosting an assembly for feasting, but the latter was not produced outside the steppes. The vessels with the greatest impact on the steppe burial assemblages were the individual serving vessels – the lacquered cups and bowls.

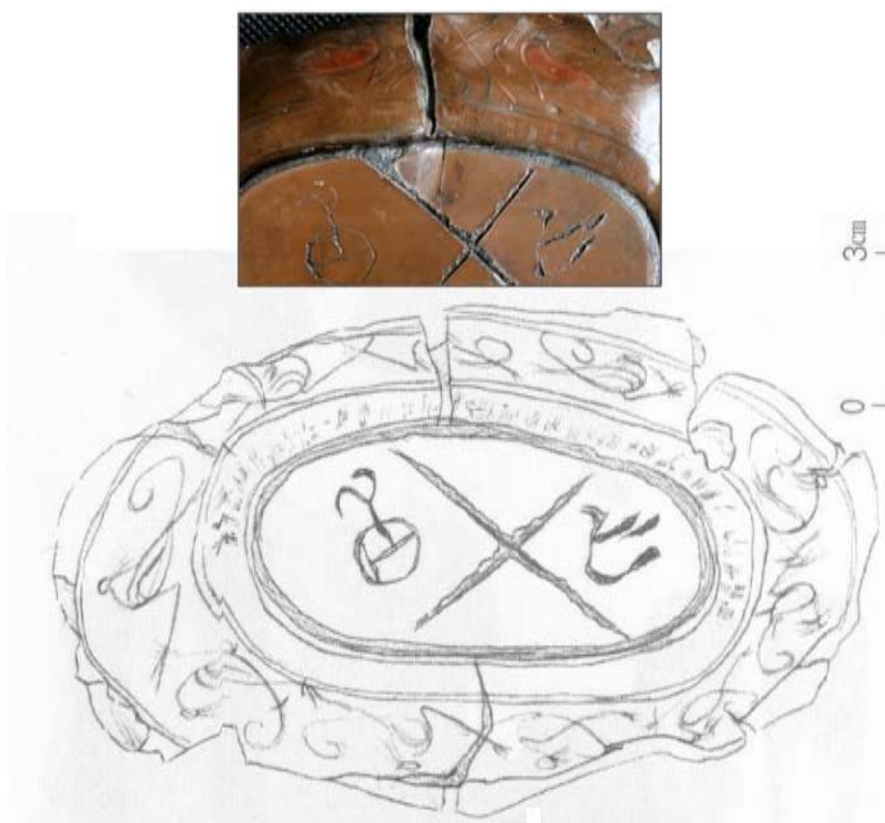


Fig.7.40 Lacquered ear-handled cup with Chinese inscriptions and added engraving, Noyon uul tomb 20 (Polosmak et al. 2008: 321)

An extensive variety of lacquer vessels were available within China in the first century BC, from highly prized products of the imperial workshops in Sichuan and the capital area of Xi'an to the more mass produced imitations from private manufacture sites

(Barbieri-Low 2007). Even though cups and bowls were found in all manner of steppe graves, a detailed analysis of the manufacture of these wares could theoretically illustrate any correlations between vessel quality and burial style or degrees of investment. While all manners of quality of vessels were mass produced, they imply different values and means of acquisition, in China as well as in the steppes. Vessels with inscriptions and craftsmanship indicative of the imperial workshops are few and far between, and have only been found in the large square tombs (Mission 2003; Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens 2007; Umehara 1960).¹²⁵ These more prestigious vessels – those manufactured in the imperial workshops and bearing inscriptions that deemed them “fit for the emperor” (*chengyu* 乘輿) – were likely artifacts from diplomatic missions or tribute which were then distributed among the highest of steppe élite.¹²⁶

The lower quality cups and bowls, appearing in many of the circular graves as well as some of the square tombs, represent a different level of value and manner of distribution. While the exceptional lacquers found in the square tombs may relate to the archetypal tribute-and-redistribution trickle down model, the spread of the standard lacquer vessels found in the circular graves probably relates to more composite systems of controlled redistribution and gifting along with restricted trade networks and market

¹²⁵ A lacquered box found in tomb 7 at Tsaraam bears an inscription detailing an imperial workshop which produced the artifact (Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens 2007), as does a recent lacquer find from Gol Mod tomb 20 (Desroches, personal communication).

¹²⁶ Louis (2007) proposes the cup from Noyon uul tomb 6, which has inscriptions indicating its make in the imperial workshops at the capital and an additional pair of characters carved on the bottom (*shanglin* 上林), was presented in the Shang Lin imperial gardens during a Xiongnu mission to the Chinese court which has been documented in the court histories [*Hanshu* 94B: 3817]. A pair of inscribed cups recently found in a square tomb at Noyon uul bear additional engravings on the bottoms. These do not appear to match any Chinese character, and it is difficult to discern their meaning. The broad strokes across the entirety of the cup bottoms stand in contrast to the small incisions made for the Chinese inscription along the edge of the vessel, though, and probably relate to a later transaction through which the cup proceeded.

accesses. The lacquer bowl discovered at Tamiryn ulaan khoshoo bears an auspicious inscription for one's "sons and grandsons" [Fig.7.12c] that equates to marketing slogans which appeared on lacquer vessels in the late Western or early Eastern Han (Barbieri-Low 2007: 145). This evidences that marketed pieces, in addition to vessels set aside for official tribute gifts, made their way into the steppes.

Louis (2007: 51) suggests that since these lesser vessels were not manufactured in the imperial workshops, they represent avenues of trade from diplomatic market agreements and numerous embassies traveling between the steppes and China. A distinction of relative qualities amongst those cups and bowls in the circular graves could theoretically be investigated, but many of the lacquers are unearthed as flaked fragments [Fig.7.39] or fall apart soon after exposure, making further detailed analysis nearly impossible for most of the discoveries. Whether through networks of gifting, or through several trade transactions, these both qualified as routes controlled by the ruling steppe elite, and the possession of such lacquered items indicated either the surplus wealth to obtain it, the social standing to procure it through gifting up or redistribution out, or both. Within China, lacquer vessels functioned as portable indications of wealth (Barbieri-Low 2007: 77) and were gifted and traded all across the Han empire (Hong 2006). This portability may have fit well the predominantly mobile lifestyle of the steppe groups.

These individual portable vessels were very likely used in social interactions, demonstrating as well as displaying status, though again detailed sumptuary rules regarding their usage and distribution are difficult to illuminate. For such prestigious items which were also widely distributed, we may consider a balance between dispersal and concentration. While these exotic goods were dispersed throughout large square

tombs and small circular graves and in burials as far as the Mongolian Altai,¹²⁷ they were still concentrated in the hands of the élite. The consolidation of power in the hands of rising nobility often coincides with a rapid increase in the amount of gift-giving and displays of wealth (Brumfiel 1987). Accumulation by the lower élites of forms of wealth and accoutrements of power similar to, though also inferior to, the high aristocracy would in fact be encouraged by those members of the uppermost echelon. The assemblage of exotic sumptuary goods, such as feasting cups, which circulated among the élite ranks tied the receivers to the rites associated with these luxury items and indebted them to those ruling groups in control of the economic and social networks which made possible the access to these foreign goods.

Accoutrements and Arenas of Power

Funerary offerings to the deceased are demonstrations of surplus wealth, as are feasts, and in the case of funerary feasts and overlap often occurred in the necessary materials. As the overwhelming majority of animal offerings placed in burials of the Iron Age steppes consist of the heads and extremities [Fig.6.48], we might then begin to investigate the earlier stages of the offering ceremonies, or, more simply put, ask what happened to the other portions of the carcasses. Such animal offerings in the graves may have denoted accompanying wealth for the deceased, but the act of sacrificing the animals demonstrated the wealth of those who relinquished them. Furthermore, their function as accompaniment in the burial was probably preceded by a phase of

¹²⁷ Chinese lacquer vessels have also been found in areas as far as Korea (Umehara 1943) and Afghanistan (Hackin 1954).

consumption before deposition. If we consider sacrifice as a process, and life-taking as one portion of that larger process, then the mortuary offerings found in graves are the material end of that process. Valeri (1994) divides this process into four stages – induction, taking life, renunciation, and consumption. *Renunciation* is defined as the practice of separating the body of the offering into those portions which are renounced for presentation to the benefactor of the ceremony – in this case the deceased – and those which are consumed by the practitioners and participants of the ceremony. Ritual feasts associated with consumption by the living participants of a portion of the offering probably account for the parts of the animal which were not interred within the graves.

Feasts, more precisely defined, are the sharing of special foods for a special purpose (Hayden 2001). The consumables may be extraordinary in their quantity, demonstrating wealth and its redistribution. Such a demonstration was important for the assertion of authority since surplus acted as an economic insurance against crises. Feasts may also be qualitatively significant, denoting restricted events and the associated access to restrictive networks by its participants. These social practices transformed surplus, through offering and receiving, into social relationships. Participation in a feast was acceptance of a contractual debt (Hayden 2001: 35) and the creation of a particular socio-political relationship between the host and the attendees. Thus, as the hosting of a feast was a means to assert one's power, the boycotting of a feast and its associated practices was a means to challenge the authority of that host.

Both funerals and feasts were ritualized “theaters of power” (Kehoe 2002) for expressing idealized concepts and desired relationships (Dietler 2001: 69), and the archaeological material analyzed thus far constitutes the accoutrements, resources and

physical arenas for such expressions. In the first century BC, the nature of prestige goods changed from luxury items of local style and, for the most part, local manufacture, to exotic goods which required greater wealth and greater control of or access to routes of tribute and trade. Funerary arenas and structures for the élite of the Mongolian steppes expanded rapidly in size, complexity and territorial extent and branched into the creation of a new type of arena for mortuary rituals and expressions of power and identity. The square tombs required a greater investment of labor and resources, and collected numerous foreign styles and customs within a framework of steppe traditions, all directed toward the cohesive elevation of a ruling aristocracy above competing members of the greater Mongolian steppe élite and in contrast to neighboring political entities.

Changes Narrated by the Archaeological Record

Several developments related to shifting strategies of power politics become apparent in a chronologically informed consideration of the archaeological record for the Xiongnu polity. The most obvious changes were visible within the landscape. There occurred a shift between the earlier and later periods in the spread of what had been similar traditions and material culture across the Mongolian steppes and north China, to a more dense spread of sites across the Mongolian steppes and into the Altai and Siberian regions to the west. During the early period of 3rd to 1st centuries BC, the Iron Age landscape was covered in large stone monuments from nearly a millennium previous and yet only with minimal scatters of stone demarcations for burials of the local élite.

In the 1st century BC, however, there was a sudden growth in the number of burial grounds with circular demarcations and a sudden appearance of a new form of burial that

far surpassed the circular burials of the previous period and were even grander than the stone mounds from centuries before. These circular and square burials exhibited qualitative as well as quantitative differences and the new square tombs were likely begun as a powerful means of identifying the interred, as well as the participants of the funerals, clearly and categorically distinct and above the other factions of the imperial élite society. The tradition of monumentality was undoubtedly visible in the stone structures of the Bronze Age strewn across the steppes, and the mounds of the square tombs certainly drew on the power of those traditions. The form of these new monuments, however, seemed to draw on styles seen in far-reaching areas from China to South Siberia.

Accompanying the growth in quantity and size of interments, was a dramatic shift in the nature of prestige goods. Steppe-style ornaments were quickly replaced with feasting equipment from China, ornamentations from western Inner Asia, and luxury objects as far as the Hellenistic world. The foreign imports appeared as pieces of greater assemblages from their areas of origin and were placed often in contexts equivalent to steppe-style practices. The sudden shift of objects and theaters was not due to the influx of peoples or the adoption of new cultural institutions, but rather a more mixed exotic fashion for the trappings and settings of the élite in the steppe empire.

Chapter Eight:

CONCLUSION

Through the course of this dissertation, I have attempted to provide a more dynamic understanding of the Inner Asian polity known as the Xiongnu. Drawing on the results of detailed historical and archaeological analyses in the preceding chapters, I will now integrate the narratives presented by these analyses of varied sources of evidence toward a new understanding of the chronology, structures and strategies of the steppe empire. Discursive approaches to the integration of textual and material evidence, independent of dichotomized paradigms contingent upon a comparison to the historically “outside” narrating society, allow for reconsiderations of the power politics within the steppe polities. I have employed the contexts of correspondence outlined by Andr n (1998) – identification, contrastive, correlative – to configure my method of combining distinct sources into a single study. This historical archaeological approach serves to progress our understanding of the steppe polity beyond obstacles of singular analyses or divided lines of inquiry.

A research paradigm of imperial strategies of power and legitimacy, rather than imperial typologies on an evolutionary scale of complexity, has provided several concepts for framing the study of the inferences of actors and manifestations of authority in a large polity. We may consider polities such as the Xiongnu, which spanned variable micro-regions of eastern Inner Asia, as organized for the management of diversity (Schreiber 2001) as well as engaged in the accentuation and conciliation of the manners of alienation between ruling and ruled entities (Bedford 2009; Morris 2009). Depending

on the realm of interaction and the groups involved, either the increase or decrease of degrees of alienation could serve to strengthen the imperial polity. I have thus strived to highlight the varied delineations of groups and ranks, the manifestations of traditions that aim to assimilate disparate groups, and, when possible, infer the strategies and motivations for such fission and fusion.

The structure of the polity as seen in the texts explicitly describes supreme rulers and aristocratic ruling agents of the empire, both of which were drawn from a restricted handful of lineages. Through piecing together scant mentions throughout the main documents, I was also able to find a collection of implicit descriptions of local leaders, possibly clients through whom the imperial aristocracy maintained control of the entire realm. These local leaders grew in mention during the second half of the first period, but by the second period ceased to be mentioned. A general quantitative spread of investment in funeral rites and goods in the first period, by the second period becomes a much broader spectrum with the addition of a dramatically different monumental form of interment that signaled a bifurcation in the elite ranks. Tribute goods to the court of the supreme Xiongnu leader were extravagant in the first period, yet, even though the Xiongnu no longer possessed the capability to demand treaties of tribute, the amounts increased dramatically by the second period in the forms of “gifts.” The sudden shift in the second period to exotic materials as the dominating elements of the prestige goods systems seems to suggest an increase in the amount of foreign goods as well as the desire for them.

We may first address *contrastive correspondences* (Andrén 1998) of analysis between the two main sources of evidence, in this case the Han Chinese historical

documents and the burials of the Iron Age steppe peoples. If I were to plot the frequency and size of burials, or the degree of investment in burials, against the projected strength of the Xiongnu polity according to the historical interpretation of the Chinese narratives, I might obtain a graph similar to Härke's (1990, 1997b) comparison of the frequencies of archaeologically attested weapon burials against historically attested military conflicts in Anglo-Saxon England [Fig.8.1].

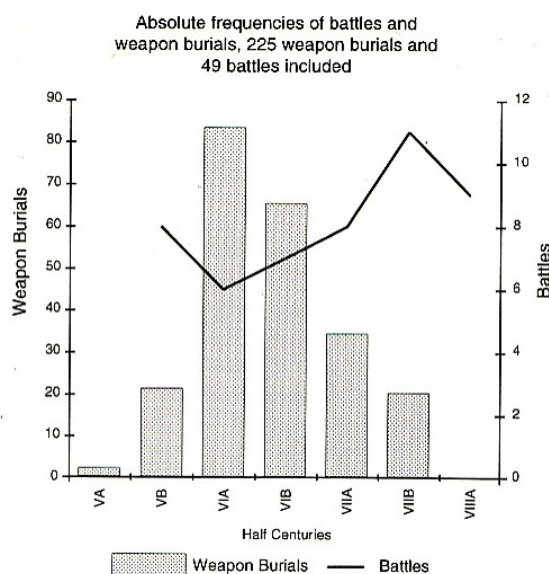


Fig.8.1 Battle-records in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and weapon-burial frequencies over three and a half centuries (Härke 1997b: 122)

Here we see a stark contrast between the archaeological and historical records projecting almost opposite trends. Rather than taking one line of evidence as more correct than the other, Härke utilizes this contrast to construct a new understanding of the weapon-burials separate from mere symbols of warfare. While I wish to engage in contrastive comparisons for the benefit of constructing new conceptualizations, I have not made a graph such as the one I suggested above since this case study and its contrastive correspondences illustrates the need to revisit the original texts and would necessitate

redrawing of such a graph. The period from the third to first century BC has been deemed by most scholars to be the singular period of Xiongnu hegemony followed by the crisis of conflict with China, growing regionalism, and the descent of Xiongnu imperial power from which it never recovered (Barfield 1989; Kradin 2001; Psarras 2003, 2004; Sneath 2007; Yü 1990).¹²⁸ The rise in expressions of authority and investments in rituals that demonstrate wealth and power beginning in the first century BC call into question the previous reconstructions of Xiongnu history. A revised consideration of the historical records, compelled from the contrast apparent in compared trajectories of power and cohesion for the historical and archaeological records record, demonstrates a reconstitution of the state and a clear resurgence of steppe power and hegemony of the Xiongnu therein. I therefore propose a chronology of two periods – much like the Türks of the sixth through seventh centuries – for the Xiongnu empire. These early Xiongnu and late Xiongnu periods each exhibited distinct changes between the two contiguous phases and incarnations of the steppe polity.

My detailed reinvestigations of the historical documents also bring forth a possible *correlative correspondence* (Andrén 1998) in the dynamics between disparate portions of the political élite. The conflict between the so-called named kings and the members of the select few lineages, who claimed restricted access to the ranks of the imperial élite, may help to explain the bifurcation of the élite in the mortuary realm. I do not wish to engage in one-to-one *identification correspondences* (Andrén 1998) that

¹²⁸ Many scholars have also spoken of the emergence of the Southern Xiongnu with this period of descent in the mid first century BC, but this is an anachronistic use of this label, which does not appear until a century later.

would match the circular graves to the named kings and their local constituents, and the square ramped tombs to the royal lineages and their ranks. Nevertheless, the clear divisions and the tension between them do correlate in a manner that perhaps explains the sudden change in mortuary traditions, increased investment in theaters and accoutrements of power, and absence of the named kings in narratives of the upper echelon of the Xiongnu empire which all occur over the course of the first century BC.

Due to a dearth of historical attention and an abundance of archaeological material, this transitional period and the resulting second phase of the Xiongnu polity have been the focus of this dissertation. Beginning in the first century BC, new traditions developed in the Xiongnu polity as strategies of authority. The substantial increase in the number of elite burial sites and graves might lead some to suggest an increase in the number of elites within the polity, but this increase should instead be seen as an intentional increase by the elites in the investment in the expressions of power, legitimacy and authority. As stated in the chapters above, more burials and bigger burials are not an indication of a society in crisis but more likely a response to such a crisis or the perceived possibility of one. Furthermore, the increased investment in the mortuary arena was likely due not to a sudden capability but more a strategic choice. Historical records indicate lavish gifts of foreign goods to the steppe rulers as well as eras of open markets during the Early Xiongnu period. The shift to exotic tastes in prestige goods systems in the Late Xiongnu should not be equated to the mere fact of their availability. Monumental mortuary constructions did not occur in the Late Xiongnu merely because of an increased ability to muster the labor and resources, especially considering the precedent of monumental constructions in the Bronze Age well before the establishment of a large

steppe polity. These changes reflect strategic changes adopted by the ruling forces of the Xiongnu empire to ensure their power and legitimacy over various regions and constituent groups.

In both textual and material evidence, the strategies for ensuring authority and control may be seen through and inferred from agents, accoutrements, and arenas of power politics. Agents of the Xiongnu empire are accounted in the lists of restricted ranks – the variant high Kings of Left and Right tied directly to the supreme *chanyu* ruler – as well as the mentions of the local clients – the “named kings” of the Xiongnu realm. The concept of clientship imperial rule (Bedford 2009) can be seen in the conquering of certain groups that are later mentioned as constituent entities of the Xiongnu polity. However, several events and proposals narrated in the texts raised the questions as to how well the imperial rulers could control their clients or to what degree the local groups would tolerate intervention in local governing. The crises of the civil war period between the Early and Late Xiongnu centered around the challenge of the local chiefs, the so-called named kings, to the imperial lineages and their claims to the position of supreme ruler. Their increased mention in the reigns leading up to the civil war signaled a conflict of control and challenge to the authority of those who ruled, and this eventually became a weakness of the steppe empire. The Five Baits proposal stressed an exploitable weakness of the imperial control over client leaders along the frontier by citing the rerouting of luxurious gifts directly to the local chiefs rather than the Xiongnu imperial court. The distribution of prestige goods in quantity and quality may be a means of understanding the prestige and political systems, and for this reason I analyzed the archaeological as well as historical record.

As stated above, the material record reflects a struggle for power between lower élites and higher ranks similar to the conflicts narrated in the historical documents. The most prominent division in this struggle for power and legitimacy appears between those interred in the standard circular graves and those interred in the square mounded tombs that suddenly appeared in the Late Xiongnu period. While the overlap in size between these two burial styles is significant, the average size is as distinct as the burial forms and features. The larger square tombs were often flanked by lines of stones with animal offerings and several, and sometimes well over a dozen, satellite burials. Some of the satellites of the greater square tombs were even on par with the larger of the circular graves. Whether the deceased in the accompanying burials were sacrificed or not, their presence as subfeatures of a greater interment, and their inexorable link of identity to the deceased within, articulates a greater degree of power. Furthermore, the cemeteries with square tombs often contain a greater number of burials, are situated in more secluded areas compared to the cemeteries of only circular graves, and tend not to contain only the largest or smallest of the standard circular graves rather than the average size group that dominates other burial grounds. Thus, the archaeological record exhibits differences of style, size, and space that collectively distinguish two groups of élite in the Xiongnu empire.

The accoutrements of the deceased also demonstrate differences between these groups of upper and lower élites. Inlaid jewelry from the west, and bronze mirrors, silk, and laquered cups and bowls from China were found in a wide spectrum of elite burials in the steppes, yet their quality seemed to vary. The Chinese ear cups interred in the monumental tombs bore inscriptions as gifts from the most prestigious imperial

workshops, whereas some of the others resembled more standard productions. The quatrefoil decoration found on many of the coffins in the standard circular graves were more elaborate in gold and sometimes inlaid for the larger monumental tombs. In addition, only the square tombs contained Chinese style chariots with horse ornaments styled after those from western Inner Asia. Gifts of chariots are one of the more prominent offerings mentioned in the tributes from the Chinese to the Xiongnu rulers, and it seems no surprise that we find them as restricted items of consumption. Proscriptions of practice in the arenas and accoutrements of the élite provided a means for the upper ranks of the empire to clearly delineate themselves in the assertions of power, legitimacy, and authority, and the core rulers of the empire would surely have emphasized the separation between themselves, who sought to retain supreme power, and those whom they sought to restrict to lower levels of political power.

The new traditions of the Late Xiongnu divided ranks of the political élite, while simultaneously uniting them in steppe practices imbued with a collective exoticism and extended to broader regions and more groups. In this manner the degree of alienation occurred not between political groups of the empire, but between the surrounding entities and the empire that asserted itself as the united cosmopolitan center of power. Assumptions about the sudden shift from steppe style prestige goods to exotic prestige goods, especially those from China, might tempt researchers with models of acculturation. However, just as the steppe-style animal combat belt plaques in early Han tombs should not be interpreted as a Chinese attempt to become “barbarian,” neither should the occurrence of Chinese imported luxury items or styles be equated to dynamics of sinicization. These exotic goods were incorporated into domestic customs and arguably

allowed for the continuation of steppe traditions despite the preponderance of foreign materials. The prestige systems of the steppe élite were redefined in the first century BC to emphasize exotic goods and forms of numerous surrounding cultures. By emphasizing the exotic nature of the prestige goods, their use and consumption reinforced the centrality of the networks of acquisition, over which the uppermost élite purported control (Lesure 1999: 48).

Beginning in the late first century BC, there arose a need for amplified expressions of authority in the mortuary arena on behalf for the uppermost echelon of the steppe polity. The clear and standardized distinctions between the circular graves and the square mounded tombs exhibit a formalized disjunction between upper and lower élites. I suggest that the threat posed by rising local élites, such as the named kings, in the later part of the Former Xiongnu regime led to more formalized means of negotiating power relationships that benefited the members of the imperial clans and ensuring their authority. The large tombs complexes that appeared alongside the tradition of circular graves demonstrated authority through monumental “theaters of power” (Kehoe 2002) and expressed legitimacy in places and practices that constituted “technologies of remembrance” (Jones 2003).

The bifurcation of the élite and the elevation of the imperial aristocracy evident in the archaeological record from the Early Xiongnu to Late Xiongnu period may be understood in the same manner as Parker-Pearson (1999: 91) proposed for archaeological analyses, “in terms of structure and agency rather than social evolution.” The modifications in theaters and accoutrements of power reflect formalized distinctions that would, ideally, better express the exclusive rights of the imperial clans to political

authority. The practices which occurred at these places and with these objects, however, should not be likened to static traditions that confirmed authority through their existence. The rites, feasts and offerings associated with funerals and funerary monuments presented occasions when relationships of social and economic power could not be reaffirmed but also renegotiated. The bond between the steppe leaders and their chiefly constituents was often one of a very personal nature (Fletcher 1986: 23), and ritual interactions that confirmed and strengthened those bonds would have served as integral institutions of the state.

Since positions of power in the steppes, whether at the local level or at the uppermost heights of the empire, could often be tenuous, there occurred a great need to express and reaffirm authority. The crisis of the early first century BC, in which local rulers played a mounting role in imperial politics and eventually made claims to the position of supra-tribal ruler, surely presented an even greater need for the imperial aristocracy to distinguish itself from the other élites and assert authority. Thus the amplified practices and prestige goods of the late first century BC and after came not at a time of crisis, but the full knowledge of the preceding crisis of state. The polity that has seemed to fill a single static mold, whatever the classification is, may now be seen as progressing through significant developments. Without the knowledge of the historical records, this might appear to represent two separate entities. However, the Chinese accounts inform us that the three hundred year spread from 209 BC to 98 AD was indeed a single political entity, and we may understand the Xiongnu empire in a more dynamic fashion through the changes in strategies of political power and the maintenance of authority.

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