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Sacred monuments of ancient Saryarka and modern researches

The accumulation of materials characterizing the sacral monuments of ancient Saryarka took decades. Places of spiritual attraction of the Bronze Age are marked by necropolises, which were often created around the large funerary structures of charismatic military leaders, spiritual leaders or rulers, combining secular and spiritual power. The most famous are Aksu-Ayuly II, Ortau II, Begazy, Buguly III, Sangyru, Aybas-Darasy. Due to large-scale researches of recent years, such burial grounds as Tanabai, Kyzyltau, Besoba, Sherubai I, Karazhartas, Shantimes have been studied by archaeological methods, which can rightly be attributed to the sacred centers of the Bronze Age. The chronological spectrum of research covers almost all of the 2nd millennium BC, emphasizing the sacred and cultural features of each period.

Keywords: necropolis, burial structure, the Bronze Age, sacral, mausoleum.

The sacred geography of the Bronze Age of Saryarka involves the study of the centers of spiritual attraction of the ancient population associated with the administration of religious and religious practices in the 2nd millennium BC. During this period, in places that were considered sacred, necropolises were organized, which were often grouped around sacred and significant funerary structures of charismatic military leaders, spiritual leaders or rulers who combined secular and spiritual power. On the burial field, they are usually distinguished by their large parameters, reflecting the high social significance of objects for the whole society.

Due to the specifics of economic activities aimed primarily at the development of the cattle-breeding sector of the economy, the population of the steppe bronze lacks specially constructed monumental buildings of a temple character in the generally accepted sense of the word. Their functions are performed by socially stratified burial complexes, which play the role of peculiar sacral centers arranged under the open sky. They appear as large earthen mounds, under the embankment of which various ritual constructions, remains of sacrifices and fiery rituals are fixed.

The accumulation of materials characterizing the sacred sites of the ancient Saryarka, occurred throughout the XX century. However, many archaeological sites have been investigated in recent years.

Consider the three archaeological cultures that have developed in the territory of Central Kazakhstan — Early Alakul, Fedorovo and Begazy-Dandybay, a number of monuments which, of course, can be attributed to the sacred and significant objects of the Bronze Age.

Petrovka funerary complexes belong to the first quarter of the 2nd millennium BC. In this period, in the Ural-Kazakhstan region, charioteer-warriors enter the historical arena, taking leading positions in the system of the social structure of society. On the burial field, their burials are marked as blurred, flattened embankments, overlapping the rounded fences of small vertically installed plates. In the central part, usually one or two large ground pits are fixed, the dimensions of which can reach 3x4 m, depth up to 2 m and more. Around are often located burials of children and relatives of lower rank. Later, burials made in stone boxes became widespread. Most of these graves are accompanied by numerous altars, arranged on the ground below the ground. A distinctive feature of the burials is the presence of a chariot complex, represented by paired bones of horses, chariots, plate cheek-pieces, as well as weapons of close and distance combat.

In the fully «equipped» form the chariot complex is quite rare. Much more often in the absence of traces of a chariot in the burial chamber, we encounter a pair of burials of sacrificial harness horses, symbolizing the presence of a «virtual» chariot. Currently, about eighty pairs of sacrificial animals are known in the Ural-Kazakhstan region [1].

Horses, as a rule, were laid along the long sides of the burial chamber or from the western, less often from the eastern face side of the grave pit, which was assigned the role of the chariot itself. In Saryarka, the paired skeletons of horses were recorded in the Aschisu, Nurtai, Ayapbergen, Nurataldy I, Tanabai and Kyzyltau burial grounds. The high social status of the deceased was also emphasized by the funeral inventory of militaristic content. First of all, these are arrowheads made of horn, stone or bronze, since it was the

bow with arrows that was the main weapon of the chariot. Bronze knives are often noted, occasionally hanging-butt axes, hooks and sleeve spearheads, which were considered weapons of the princely rank [2].

The separate category consists of finds of stone and bronze maces, interpreted as insignias of power or as objects of ritual purpose marking people of a special social rank.

Traditionally, the burials of the Bronze Age with the tops of the maces are considered as the burials of military leaders. For these graves the military attributes is characterized, and the presence of maces is interpreted as symbols of power, indicating a high lifetime status of the deceased. Maces made of soft stone often have a rather fragile structure, which implies their use within the social ranking or ritual sphere, possibly indicating the priestly status of their owners [3].

The ideological basis of the population of this period is war, which brought to life a deity endowed with pronounced military functions. Apparently, originally the maces labeled the attendants of this deity, where the «elects» combined military and priestly functions, worshiping the god of war and thunder, which in the mythological tradition was depicted jumping on a chariot with a mace in hand. With the help of his cudgel, bow and arrows, he fights against the serpent — the ruler of the hostile world.

The cult features of this deity are most present in the burials with tops of maces, arrowheads and squeezing stones for making a hallucinogenic drink. Most likely, the priests of the god of war not only asked him for good luck in battle and rich booty, but they themselves were part of military units participating in the hostilities. This can be indicated, for example, by six graves with maces from 96 counted burials of the Sintashta burial ground [4]. It is hardly possible to assume that in one team there could be such a number of military leaders, in fact, one for every 16 sup positively buried, including children and women.

This assumption was confirmed by a find in the Tundyk early Alakul burial site of a rounded bronze top of a mace found in a closed complex in Central Kazakhstan for the first time [5; 2]. The only direct analogue is the bronze top mace from the Baganaty III cemetery in northern Kazakhstan [6]. The small size and weight of bronze maces (about 200 grams) allow us to consider their purpose, as an authoritative or ritual symbol, rather than an effective military weapon.

The relative diversity of the weapons found in the burial is significant, where, besides the mace, a knife and arrowheads are encountered. There is a lack of a conventional set of labor tools on the background of the weapon set. An interesting discovery is that of a pebble stone, which may have been used in the preparation of the ritual hallucinogenic drink. It seems that this burial could be the burial of a warrior-priest, a clergyman of the deity associated with the military sphere, as indicated by the location of the grave itself, which was not the main burial. The central place was occupied by the burial in the form of a double stone box, looted in antiquity.

Of great interest is a representative quiver set of arrows with individual characteristics. Each of the eight arrowheads had its own special, distinct form. The absence of serial copies implies their use for ritual purposes when performing any ceremonial actions. The symbolism of the bow and arrow often serves as one of the most ancient attributes associated with sacred practice [7].

The instability of the political situation and the constant military conflicts contributed to the rise of the cult of the god of war and the strengthening of the power of the priests — the senders of this cult. It is indicative that in the burial the bronze mace was located in the area of the deceased's shoulder, literally copying the mythological character of the «Mace carrier», well known for rock art. These petroglyphs are interpreted as images of a thunderer, an indispensable attribute of which is the mace (club, vajra), which he carries on his shoulder [8]. It is not excluded that the servants of the cult of this formidable deity, the symbol of the Bronze Age military tribal elite, who converged in a ritual duel, could also be depicted with maces [9].

Interpretation of the burial as the burial of the priest, presupposes the existence of a developed system of religious-mythological ideas in Andronovo society, supported by specially trained people with sacred knowledge.

The significance of the cult of the god of war in the first quarter of the second millennium BC was expressed not only in the distribution of burials of priests with maces, but also in the adoption of military aristocracy of priestly functions. The subject sacralization of military power was implemented in carrying out lush and complex funerary rites, the presence of a rich inventory in the graves of the leaders-charioters, where they began to place maces, which was reflected in Petrovka elite graves.

Apparently, the afterworld, by analogy with the earthly one, was also thought of in a state of militaristic excitement, engulfed in military conflicts and predatory raids, as clearly indicated by the burial inventory, saturated with diverse weapons, and the presence of war chariots.

It is symptomatic that a number of burial grounds is isolated, where only one case of paired draft horses, symbolizing the chariot, is found in the largest necropolis barrow, in the absence of those in the rest of the burial structures (Nurtai, Ayapbergen, Tanabai). This circumstance makes it very likely that these burials are necropolitan and could belong to military leaders who originally originated from the tribal aristocracy among the ranks of warriors. Probably, they could retain a title corresponding to their social status, indicating a notable origin, for example, kshatriya or rajaystar, i.e. a warrior standing on a chariot, which was emphasized by the chariot content of the burial rite. Subsequently, representatives of the military elite become the half-legendary ancestors of one or another tribal community.

Thus, the «heroic epoch» on the territory of Kazakhstan was marked by the appearance of large mounds with an unusually «magnificent» ritual complex. The funeral inventory with pronounced «militaristic» features and chariot symbolism, may indicate the emergence in the society of this period of a special social stratum — the warriors-charioteers. The spread of the chariot complex was a kind of marker of the clan military aristocracy, which became the dominant force in the expanses of Steppe Eurasia in the first centuries of the 2nd millennium BC.

It can be stated that at this time the cult of the chariot and the charioteer is of great importance. A number of elite kurgan burial grounds appear on the territory of Saryarka, which become sacral centers of the «heroic» era, such as, for example, Satan, Aschisu, Kyzyltau, Tanabai.

Fedorovka culture covers the period from the XVIII to XVI centuries BC. A characteristic feature of the sacral architecture of the socially-stratified burial complexes of the Fedorovka culture of Central Kazakhstan is the presence of large concentric structures that fit into each other and are covered by a barrow embankment. This ritual task was solved by arranging fences rounded in plan from vertically installed slabs or built of stones by the method of building masonry, as well as by arranging ring ditches or rounded pits-depressions. In the central part, there is usually marked a single high-status burial perfect in a stone box or cysts.

One of these objects is the cemetery Besoba, where a group of large mounds was investigated. So, for example, mound 3 was an earthen mound with a diameter of 26 m and a height of 1.5 m prior to the excavations. The diameter of the outer fence was 14 m, the inner diameter was 6 m. The height reached 1.6 m. The outer fence is rather fragmented, but the inner one is almost completely preserved. It is characterized by well-worked, tightly fitted slabs of gray granite, on which, from the northeast side, an eight-pointed star and a straight cross are depicted in deep knocking. It is possible that these signs could mean the title of the ruler or symbolized a deity to which the deceased himself could be equated. The inner part of the fence is filled with a large number of large stones mixed with the ground, which apparently suggests the presence of antiquity stone structure in the center of the burial structure.

After clearing the inner fence, two burials were discovered in stone boxes — the main and additional inlet, in which were found gold earrings with a bell, plaques, stripes and ceramic vessels [10].

Ordinary fences, consisting of 2–3 single-layer rings built of stone, in their planigraphy repeated high-status structures, but they were constructed according to a simplified version, emphasizing the basic ideological model of the structure.

The concentric circles inscribed into each other are considered to be the image of the daytime light — the sun. Close or in a similar way, the head part of the «sun-headed» deities was depicted with their general anthropomorphism. Probably, such a combination of solar symbolism and anthropomorphic being we see in the Fedorovka elite burials. The semantics of the structures fit into the mythology «the fence with the burial — the sun-man». In other words, the buried was a kind of symbol of the solar deity and his living incarnation on earth. The difference is also noted in the rock art, where sun-headed anthropomorphs are much higher and more images of ordinary people. «Gigantism» emphasized their greatness and divine essence, which is noted, for example, in the altar scene of the sanctuary Tamgaly [11; 2].

Apparently, we can talk about the wide spread of the solar cult, which occupies a central place in the ideological sphere of Fedorovka society. It is realistic to assume that society in this case was organized according to the theocratic principle, where the top of the social pyramid was occupied by a person with an unprecedented high status and, accordingly, the broadest powers.

So, if the differences in the construction of the burial structures of ordinary graves and elite burials are difficult to measure, then the analysis of the burial chambers and the accompanying inventory did not reveal such contrasts. Stone grave boxes are fairly standard for all members of society, regardless of status. Consequently, it can be a question not of a socio-economic, but exclusively of a social, but an incredibly high ranking of the society of the Fedorovka culture.

The external difference, which could distinguish prominent members of society from the rest of the tribesmen, according to preliminary data of the burial rite, is the wearing of gold earrings with a bell. Such earrings were found only in men's (gender and age definitions made by the candidate of historical sciences K.N. Solodovnikov) extraordinary burial structures and, apparently, are a kind of «calling card» of the Fedorovka elite.

Thus, the Fedorovka culture of Central Kazakhstan was a highly centralized and well-organized tribal society, apparently divided on tribal basis into separate associations of tribal groups. The social structure of one such association consisted of a deified highly status leader and common members of the community. Power and spiritual functions may have been inherited, acquiring the character of dynastic government. For example, only one large socially stratified structure was recorded on a single burial ground of Besoba with two dozen private burials. This sacred place can rightfully be called a kind of «valley of the kings» of the Bronze Age. Certainly, such well-known necropolis of Fedorovka culture as Aksu-Ayuly II, Baybala II, Ortau II can be attributed to similar high-status sacral monuments of the Bronze Age [12].

To the sacred monuments of the Begazy-Dandybay culture of Saryarka, developing in the XV-XII centuries BC, undoubtedly, belong large mausoleums of tribal nobility, where, with all the external similarity of construction equipment, distinctive features of each of them can be traced.

Against the general background of the Begazy-Dandybay antiquities, the Karazhartas mausoleum with a pyramidal-step shape stands out for its unique design, which made it possible to draw analogies with the countries of the Middle East. It is assumed that in antiquity there existed a trans-Asian corridor connecting the civilizations of the Middle East and Central Asia, through which not only migratory flows, but also their accompanying things, ideas and technologies, including construction canons, were moving in both directions. This is confirmed, for example, by the widespread use of the war chariot in Western Asia, Egypt, and the Balkans, which was invented in the Ural-Kazakhstan steppes.

Oriented by the corners of the cardinal directions, the pyramidal-step construction of the mausoleum consisted of 5–6 rows of walls, where each row receding to the center was higher than the previous one.

The length of the outer perimeter is 14x14.5x14.3x13.5 m, height — 1.5 m. Outside the walls are lined with fragmentary preserved large slabs installed vertically. From the southeast, a dromos was added to the burial chamber, cutting through the walls of the mausoleum.

From the north, northeast and east at a distance of up to half a meter from the facing plates, a heavily destroyed fence composed of building masonry up to 0.3 m high was fixed. It was blocked by numerous un-systematic stacks of stones that appeared as a result of the destruction of the upper structures of the monument during the repeated penetration of the burial chamber of the mausoleum.

The inner space of the central perimeter of the walls was a burial chamber of the ground type, which was almost completely robbed in antiquity. In the study of the necropolis, individual human bones, a gold ring, bronze knives, arrowheads, needles were found, as well as a representative ceramic collection [13].

The large burial chamber and impressive parameters of the Karazhartas mausoleum, characteristic of all the outstanding Begazy mausoleums, point to the underlying socio-economic processes that take place in the society of this period. First of all, the dimensions of the burial chambers testify to this, which, unlike, for example, from the Fedorovka chambers, increases by several times, which presupposes filling them with numerous and diverse accompanying equipment. At construction of the mausoleums the building stone, plates, blocks is widely used. The most famous sacred monuments of Begazy-Dandybay culture are the mausoleums of Begazy, Buguly III, Sangyru, Aibas-Darasy, attributed to the objects of monumental memorial-cult architecture of the late Bronze Age [14, 15]. They demonstrate a high degree of ranking and centralization of the communities that are carriers of the Begazy-Dandybay cultural traditions.

Building such grandiose objects for the Late Bronze Age could only be afforded by a highly organized and well-managed society with significant human resources and centralized power, and in this case the status of a leader could approach the early royal rank or another title of that time.

Socially stratified mausoleums are distinguished by their monumentality, which confirmed the special significance of the representatives of society buried here. For example, in the Karazhartas mausoleum, social stratification was emphasized by the number of bypass fences, stepwise rising to the central part, the semantics of which can mean moving up the steps, towards the sky. The originality of the stepped construction, good visibility served as a reminder of the ruler's connection with the heavenly deities and demonstration of the sacredness of power itself in ancient society, obtained by birthright and involvement in this or that celestial being, as well as the sacrality of the place as a whole.

Thus, the megalithic constructions of the high-status Begazy-Dandybay mausoleums and the enormous labor costs associated with their construction, with good reason, make it possible to attribute these monuments to the monumental sacral architecture of the late Bronze Age.

The Shantimes fence, decorated in a completely different style and referring to the very finale of the Bronze Age (10th century BC), stands a little apart. Giant stone platform of 1650 square meters, unlike other structures, is not oriented in the vertical, but in the horizontal projection, designed for perception from above, i.e. from the height of the sky, where, according to the ideas of the ancients, supreme deities lived, to which it was dedicated. Similar principles underlie the construction of the Torgai geoglyphs and burial mounds with long arc-shaped stone calculations — «mustache».

In form, the structure resembles a mandala image — a square with a circle inscribed in it — where the celestial sphere, embodied in the form of a barrow and the earth in the form of a quadrangular fence, thought like the four directions of the world harmoniously connected. Most likely, in this case, we see not so much a funerary as a temple-ritual complex of the Bronze Age, built under the open sky. This is confirmed by numerous fireplaces around the perimeter of the fence and dozens of stone altars around the sacral center, represented by stone rings. In the study of fireplaces, a stone altar and fragmented bones, including the human lower jaw, were found, which does not exclude the holding of a ceremony of human sacrifice.

It has been established that the real labor costs for the construction of a ritual and ceremonial complex are more than 1000 times higher than the labor costs for the construction of a private burial [16].

Thus, it can be stated that the level of social labor for the construction of sacred and significant funeral structures was directly proportional to the level of social, later and socio-economic ranking, complicated by ideological factors, which is especially important for the polar strata of the Bronze Age society of Saryarka.

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Ежелгі Сарыарқаның сакралды ескерткіштері және заманауи зерттеулер

Ежелгі Сарыарқа сакралды ескерткіштерін сипаттайтын материалдарды жинақтау он жылдықтармен жүргізілді. Қола дәуірінің рухани тартылыс орындары некропольдермен белгіленді, олар жиі зайырлы және рухани билікті біріктірген дарынды әскери қолбасшылардың, рухани көшбасшылардың немесе басқарушылардың ірі жерлеу құрылыстарының айналасына құрылады. Аса танымалылары Ақсу-Аюлы II, Ортау II, Беғазы, Бұғылы III, Саңғыру, Айбас-Дарасы болып табылады. Соңғы жылдары археологиялық әдістермен ауқымды зерттеулердің арқасында Танабай, Қызылтау, Бесоба, Шерубай I, Қаражартас, Шантимес сияқты қорымдар зерттелді, оларды қола дәуірінің сакралды орталықтарына толық негізбен жатқызуға болады. Әрбір дәуірге тән, сакралды белгілері және мәдени ерекшеліктеріне көңіл аударылған, зерттеулердің хронологиялық шоғыры іс жүзінде барлық б.д.д. II мың ж. қамтиды.

Кілт сөздер: некрополь, жерлеу құрылыстары, қола дәуірі, сакралды, кесене.

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Сакральные памятники древней Сарыарки и современные исследования

Накопление материалов, характеризующих сакральные памятники древней Сарырки, происходило десятилетиями. Места духовного притяжения эпохи бронзы отмечены некрополями, которые нередко создавались вокруг крупных погребальных сооружений военных предводителей, духовных лидеров или правителей, совмещающих светскую и духовную власть. Наиболее известными являются Ақсу-Аюлы II, Ортау II, Бегазы, Бугулы III, Санғыру, Айбас-Дарасы. Благодаря масштабным исследованиям последних лет археологическими методами изучены такие могильники, как Танабай, Қызылтау, Бесоба, Шерубай I, Каражартас, Шантимес, которые с полным основанием можно отнести к сакральным центрам бронзового века. Хронологический спектр исследований охватывает практически всё II тыс. до н.э., подчеркивая сакральные черты и культурные особенности, характерные для каждого периода.

Ключевые слова: некрополь, погребальное сооружение, эпоха бронзы, сакральный, мавзолей.

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