

TURKIC ENCLOSURES OF THE MONGOLIAN ALTAI: NEW DATA ON THE TRADITIONS OF THE RITUAL PRACTICES OF NOMADS IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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Abstract: From 2007 to 2015, the Buyant Russian-Mongolian archaeological expedition conducted in the territory of the Mongolian Altai targeted the research of ritual structures of the Turkic time (6th–8th cc. AD), which in scientific literature are called enclosures because of the square or rectangular shape of the base structure in the form of installed stone slabs. During the fieldwork, several hundreds of these monuments were discovered. The largest concentration was recorded in the northern part of the mountain range. 27 Turkic enclosures have been excavated in the Mongolian Altai during the years of work of Buyant expedition and their relative chronology is discussed in this paper. We outline the evolution of the tradition of the constructions of Turkic enclosures through different historical periods. We discuss their purpose on the basis of their structural design and associated material finds. Of particular importance are the stone sculptures and the Turkic inscriptions discovered alongside the enclosures. We propose the use of natural science dating methods and the decoding of the found texts for further research into these early medieval enclosures.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, a substantial corpus of new scientific materials showcasing the research prospects of the early medieval history of the peoples of Inner Asia stems from research results obtained in Mongolia. For a long time, it was a poorly studied region, with only fragmentary information about the ethnocultural processes that took place in the second half of the I. millennium AD. But the increased implementation of expedition projects carried out within the framework of cooperation of Mongolian archaeologists with specialists from various foreign research centers helped push research forward.

However, few archaeological structures in the territory of Mongolia such as the Turkic enclosures have yet been comprehensively studied. International

collaborative projects have led to the discovery and excavation of monuments of the early Medieval period. Among them are funerary and commemorative complexes, as well as settlement sites demonstrating diverse forms of development of a nomadic civilization of the early Middle Ages. However, in most cases, the field research is limited to visual surveys, and the photographing and documentation of stone sculptures. Targeted research of Turkic enclosures has not been carried out. Oftentimes, they were identified during the course of other research – for example, in the search for Xiongnu barrows and archaeological complexes of other chronological periods.

A full-scale field study of these funerary and commemorative complexes would therefore yield

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critical scientific information on the region's archaeology. The important elements of the Turkic funerary architecture are ritual structures, including square or rectangular stone enclosures and accompanying structural features (sculptures, *balbals*, altars, „extensions,” etc.). This kind of structural complex is the most common archaeological monument in the Inner Asian region and mark the boundaries of nomadic communities in the early Middle Ages.

The study of Turkic enclosures and accompanying structural features have been widely presented in Russian literature, which includes a significant number of monographs. Nonetheless, information to be gleaned from this type of monuments is far from being exhausted. To date, of special importance is the conduct of targeted local field studies of Turkic ritual complexes in poorly studied parts of the Inner Asian region, especially in the territory of the Mongolian Altai. Primary data from fieldwork would allow researchers to fill the gaps in the existing database, reveal the features of the ritual practice of nomadic groups in different territories, and obtain valuable information for the reconstruction

of various aspects of the history of nomads, which are very poorly presented in written sources.

Since 2007, the Buyan Russian-Mongolian archaeological expedition, established by the Altai State University (Barnaul, Russia), Khovd State University (Khovd, Mongolia) and Ulaanbaatar City University (Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia), has been carrying out systematic research in the territory of the Mongolian Altai aimed at identifying, documenting and understanding features of Turkic ritual complexes. In this paper, we discuss two main aspects of this field research. First, we present a comprehensive description and chronology of the ritual practice of the Turks of the Mongolian Altai, which is still poorly studied because very few sites (not more than 50 enclosures) have been fully excavated. Second, based on the excavation materials obtained by the Buyant Expedition, we establish the function of the Turkic enclosures, which has remained to this day, a controversial subject due to the lack of scientific data. We propose that in the early period of the Turkic material culture, the enclosures were cenotaphs. In the later stages, their function changed and they became commemorative structures.

RESEARCH TOOLS AND METHODS

The Buyant Russian-Mongolian archaeological expedition led by A. Tishkin in 2007–2015, investigated 27 Turkic enclosures (*Fig. 1*) with various accompanying objects (sculptures, stelae, *balbalas*, altars, etc.). This makes up the majority of such objects, fully excavated today in the territory of the Mongolian Altai. The materials obtained provided a representative sample of the various aspects of the ritual practice among early medieval nomads.

The research methodology, consistently implemented in the course of these studies, includes several stages. The first stage of work consisted of conducting full-scale surveys of the study region and identifying archaeological monuments of various types. The structures identified were mapped by means of a GPS handheld device. A general plan was created for each of the structural complexes. In the second stage, structures were selected for the study on account of their state of preservation, the size of the site, previous excavation history, finds from adjacent sites, and the location of the site etc.

Most importantly, we consider the potential of the site in addressing the cultural and chronological schemes of the history of early medieval nomads of the Mongolian Altai, which is the main goal of the expedition. In the final stage, excavation of selected complexes were carried out, during which time all selected structures are documented in detail.

The Turkic enclosures were studied along with the area adjacent to them which made it possible to identify a number of accompanying objects (previously mentioned) that were not visible on the modern surface. The study of stone sculptures, which included creating mica coated copies of sculptures, allowed a more detailed recording of the images and further post-fieldwork analysis. At the end of the excavations, each ritual complex was restored to its initial original structural design. These restorations are often used for touristic exhibits; they also serve as site models for future investigations.

To determine the date of the excavated Turkic ritual complexes, two main methods were used.

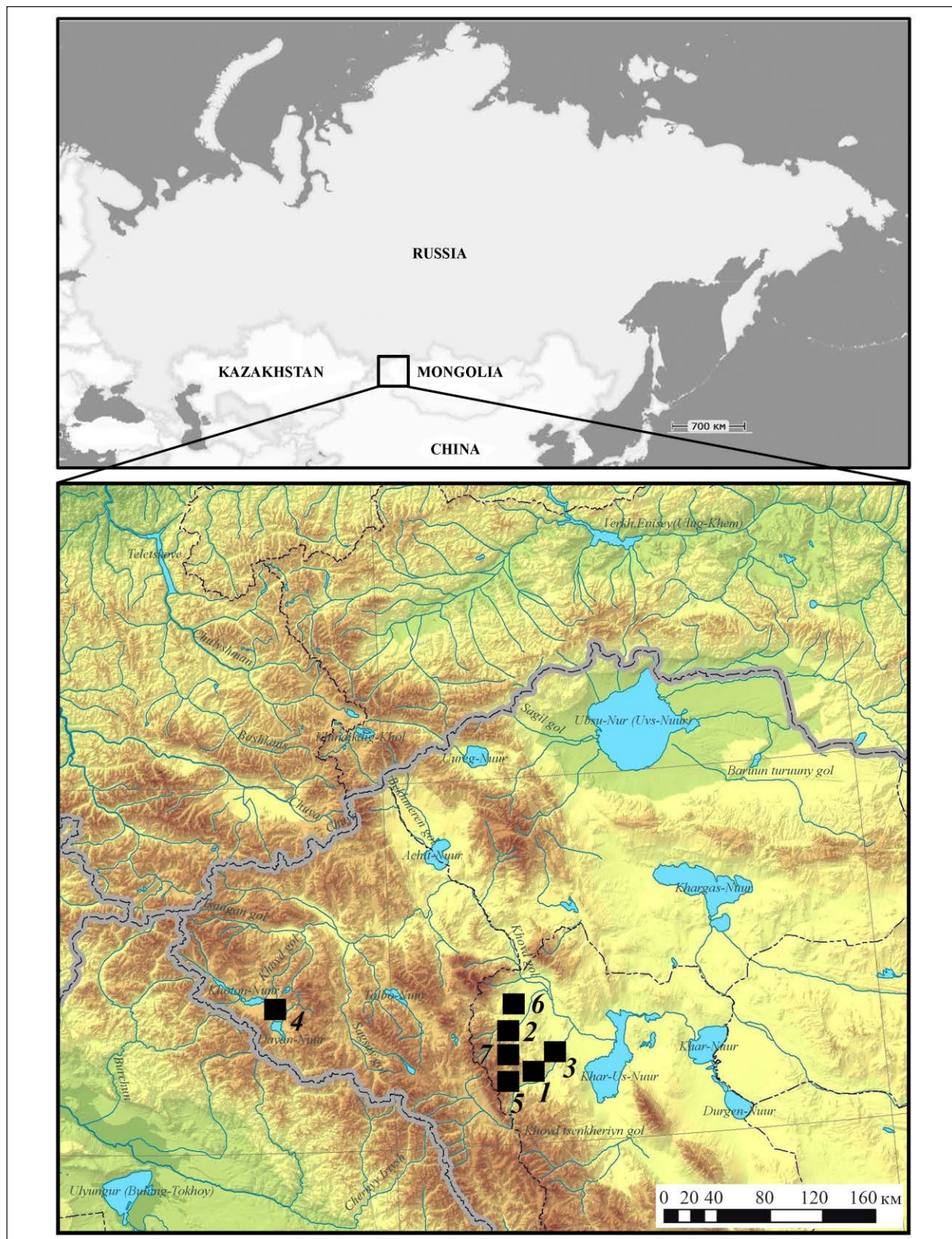


Fig. 1. Map of the locations of the Turkic complexes excavated during the Buyant expedition in the Mongolian Altai.
 1: Bayan-Bulag-I-II; 2: Biyreg; 3: Bugatyn uzuur-I-II; 4: Godon-Gol-IV; 5: Ulaan hudag-I; 6: Harganat-II; 7: Har Uzur-I
 Рис. 1. Карта расположения тюркских комплексов, раскопанных в ходе работ Буянтской экспедиции на территории Монгольского Алтая. 1: Баян-Булаг-I и II; 2: Бийрэг; 3: Бугатын узуур-I и II; 4: Годон-Гол-IV; 5: Улаан худаг-I; 6: Харганат-II; 7: Хар узуур-I

The first was to search for analogies from already dated materials. The most important source was reports of archaeological fieldwork in the Russian Altai, including surveys conducted at other times by the authors of the article. To date, more than 300 Turkic enclosures have been studied in the designated region and a few radiocarbon dates were obtained. It is important to note that a number of such structures contain characteristic burial goods which allow a rather accurate dating of the complexes.

The second method involves the analysis of materials obtained in the territory of the Mongolian Altai

by incorporating all existing information on the peculiarities of the formation and directions of evolution of the tradition of Turkic ritual structures. Of particular importance were images on stone sculptures that serve to illustrate the specific elements of the material culture of nomads (weapons, clothing, jewelry, etc.), as well as the material remains discovered inside the enclosures, such as iron knives and remnants of belt ornaments. In some cases, the analysis of rare features such as runic inscriptions or the image of animals on the wall of the enclosure helps clarify the chronology of the Turkic ritual complexes excavated.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MONGOLIAN ALTAI TURKIC ENCLOSURES

The materials from excavations carried out in the most western (Khovd and Bayan-Ulgi) *aimags* of Mongolia showcase the main characteristics of Turkic ritual complexes in various chronological stages of the Early Medieval Period. It is important to note that these monuments demonstrate both the general and special features of the ritual practices of early medieval nomads.

The earliest complex the Buyant Expedition studied in the territory of the Mongolian Altai is enclosure no. 1 of the Godon-Gol-IV complex (*Fig. 2*). This site is located on the left bank of the river of the same name, in the Bayan-Ulgiy Aimak. The research was carried out in 2015. The clearing of the enclosure revealed a structure with a foundation made up of walls constructed of vertically installed slabs between 1.65 and 2.2 m long (*Fig. 2. 1–2*). The enclosure was filled with several layers of large stones and slabs laid flat on the floor and then on top of each other (*Fig. 2. 3–5*). During the excavation of the internal area of the structure, animal bones and fragments of a ceramic vessel were found (*Fig. 2. 8–11*). In the central part of the enclosure, a construction in the form of a cist (0.6 × 0.35 m) was revealed (*Fig. 2. 6*). At the center is a pit 0.7 m deep containing remnants of a wooden post (*Fig. 2. 7*).

The design features of this enclosure make it possible to date it to the time of the First Turkic Khaganate (the second half of the 6th to the first half of the 7th centuries AD). The complexes of that time were characterized by a well-defined perimeter: the walls of the enclosures were composed of slabs. Another definitive characteristic of the Turkic

enclosures of the early Medieval period is the presence of a slab cist. Such constructions have indirect analogies in the stone constructions of the Altai population of the preceding Xianbei-Rouran period, which are recorded in the sites of the Bulan-Koba culture.

The next stage in the history of the Mongolian Altai Turks is illustrated by materials from the excavation of the Bayan Bulag-II Complex, which was carried out in 2009. This site is located on the left bank of the Buyant river 24–25 km southwest of Hovd, in the Khovd Aimag. The site included four stone enclosures, arranged in a row in the south-north direction and showing a single planigraphic complex (*Fig. 3. 1–2*). The walls of enclosures were constructed from three to six slabs. A circular pit was revealed at the center of one of the enclosures on the floor level. Several objects, including an iron chisel, four gold plates with holes and an iron ring were found (*Fig. 3. 4–9*). Near the eastern wall of each of the enclosures stood a statue (*Fig. 3. 3*).

The Turkic enclosures at the Bayan Bulag-II site demonstrate the tradition of the erection of structures in the Mongolian Altai. The archaeological evidence corresponds to the historical realities of the second half of the I. millennium AD (the main events of political history, which are known from written sources) when this type of ritual complex was found in almost every part of Inner Asian that was ruled by the Turks. The materials are analogous to many monuments in the Russian Altai. These early medieval constructions at the site of Bayan Bulag-II were also erected in the area of the funeral-memorial com-



Fig. 2. Godon-Gol-IV enclosure. 1: View from the south before the excavation; 2: View after exposing the stone structure, photo from the south; 3: Section of the enclosure, photo from the east; 4: View after cleaning the internal filling, photo from the south; 5: View of the enclosure after all the internal components are removed; 6: Cist; 7: Hole with remnants of a wooden post; 8–11: Ceramic fragments

Рис. 2. Комплекс Годон-Гол-IV. 1: Вид оградки с юга до начала раскопок; 2: Вид после зачистки каменного сооружения, фото с юга; 3: Разрез оградки, фото с востока; 4: Вид после зачистки внутреннего заполнения, фото с юга; 5: Вид оградки после удаления внутреннего заполнения, фото с юга; 6: Каменный ящичек, вид сверху; 7: Яма с остатками деревянного столба; 8–11: Фрагменты керамики

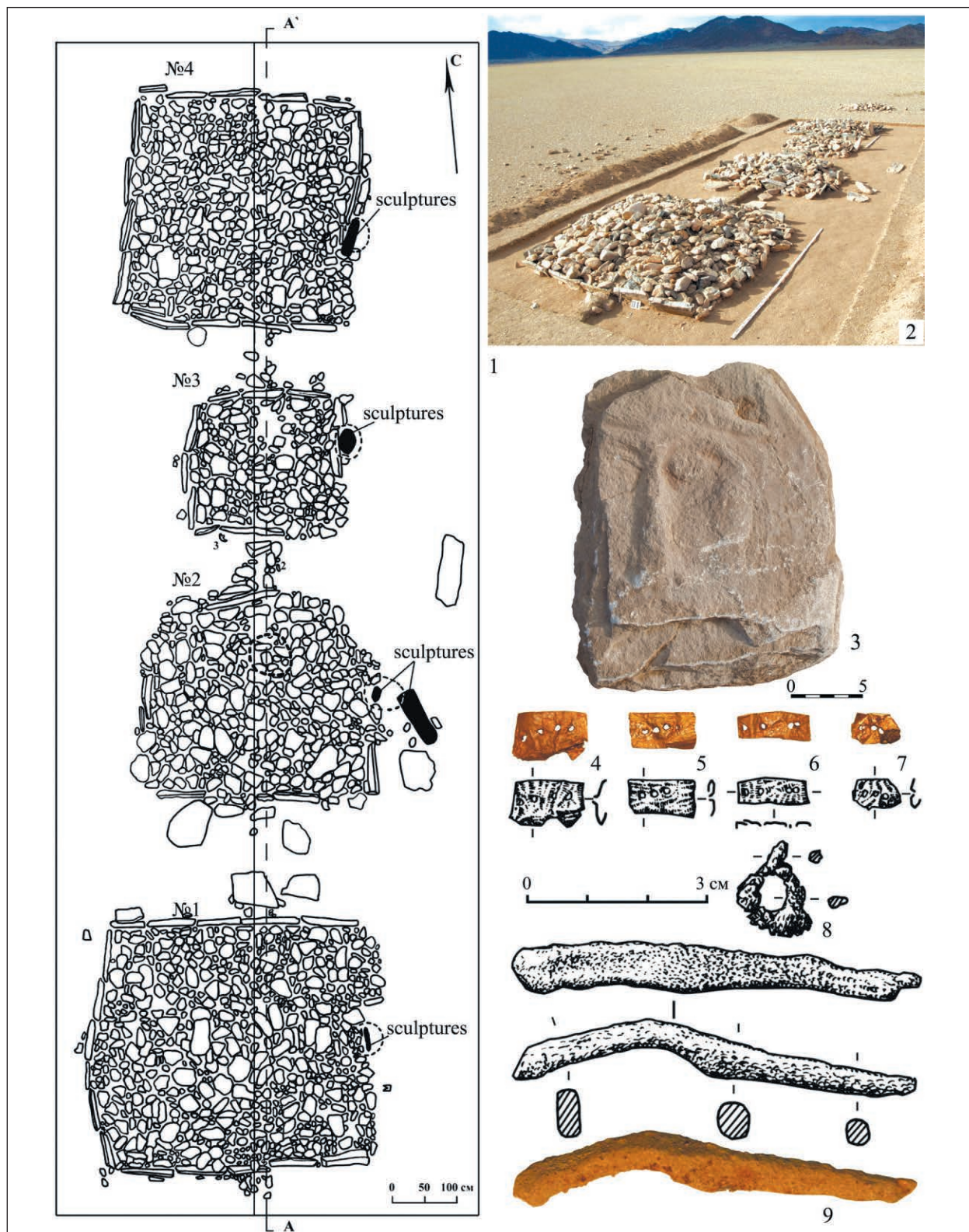


Fig. 3. Bayan-Bulag-II Complex. 1: The general plan of the complex of enclosures; 2: View of the enclosures after exposure, photo from the south-east; 3: The upper part of the sculpture near enclosure no. 1; 4–7: Gold finds from the pit in enclosure no. 2; 8–9: Iron products from the pit in enclosure no. 2

Рис. 3. Комплекс Баян-Булаг-II. 1: Общій план раскопа; 2: Вид оградок после зачистки, фото с юго-востока; 3: Верхняя часть скульптуры у оградки №1; 4–7: Находки из золота, оградка №2; 8–9: Железные изделия из ямы в оградке №2

plexes of an earlier time. Judging by the materials unearthed, the quadrangular and nearby enclosures constructed next to each other with statues, with „sacrificial” pits inside in some cases, were built over a rather long time period, i.e. in the second half of the 5th – 8th centuries. The statues discovered at enclosures no. 1, 3 and 4, are stelae with anthropomorphic bas-relief (*Fig. 3. 3*). Only the statue in enclosure no. 2 looks like a sculpture.

Similar statues with faces were studied at the Yaloman-VII complex in the Russian Altai. The design features of the constructions and the bridle-bit found date back to the Kudyrgy period of the Turkic time (second half of the 6th – first half of the 7th centuries). This shows that enclosures of the Bayan Bulag-II complex were at a time when statues with faces began to transition into three-dimensional sculptures (apparently, closer to the middle of the 7th century). This dating can be confirmed by the perforated gold plates discovered during the excavation (*Fig. 3. 4–7*). These gold plates were most likely ornamental pieces sewed onto a handbag. It should be emphasized that such products have not been previously recorded in the study of „ordinary” Turkic enclosures in the territory of Mongolia. The golden stripes found in enclosure no. 2 are analogous to materials from the Chadir site in the Russian Altai, which is dated to between the second half of the 7th and the first half of the 8th century.

Some of the enclosures investigated by the Buyant expedition date back to the period of the Second East Turkic Kaganate (second half of the 7th – first half of the 8th centuries). One example is enclosure no. 2 at Bayan-Bulag-I, a site on the left bank of the Buyant river, 24-25 km southwest of the city of Khovd, in the Khovd aimak. Even though the construction had been partially destroyed, we were able to obtain a reconstruction of its original structure during our 2010 expedition, through which we carried out further analyses. Enclosure no. 2 is a single sub-square enclosure with a statue installed on the east side (*Fig. 4. 1–4*). The shape of the enclosure is related to the presence of this statue since a circular design is not typical of Turkic monuments. The site has an interesting structural design of a pit in the center of the enclosure with remains of a wooden pole.

During the excavations, a fragment of a ceramic vessel without a decoration and an iron knife were found (*Fig. 4. 5*). The combination of objects with such design features are most prevalent in the tradition of the Inner Asian Turks in the period between 552 and 745 AD. The iron knife is characteristic of the material culture of early medieval nomads and does not have a precise chronology. The most important object for dating in the Bayan-Bulag-I Complex is a stone statue that was crafted from an ancient “deer” stone (*Fig. 4. 6–7*). This is evidenced by the presence of an embossed ring feature in the bottom half of the statue.

It should be noted that the re-using of ancient statues was not uncommon among the Turks in the early Middle Ages. This phenomenon has also been observed at a number of sites in other territories of Inner Asia (Altai, Tuva, Central Mongolia). Based on the design of a vessel in the right hand and in the left hand, a sword suspended from a belt, the sculpture installed near enclosure no. 2, crafted from an ancient deer stone, belongs to a series of classical Turkic images of male warriors. The analysis of images on sculpture allows one to precisely date the statue. Swords with rectangular elongated crosshairs are characteristic of Turkic weapons of the second half of the 7th – the first half of the 8th centuries. The earring from the statue near enclosure no. 2 is similar those discovered on Turkic monuments of the first half of the 8th century. Thus, the excavated complex can be attributed to the Katandinsky stage of the Turkic culture (the second half of the 7th – the first half of the 8th centuries).

The complex of five enclosures excavated at the Har Uzur-I site is attributed to the same period of the history of the Mongolian Altai Turks. It is located in the valley of the Dund Us river, near the center of Hovd Somon, in the Khovd Aimag. Excavations were carried out in 2012. Square-shaped objects enclosures with walls composed of 2–4 slabs are arranged in a N-S oriented row (*Fig. 5. 1–2*). In the study of enclosures, the variability of internal and external structures was recorded: sacrificial pits in the western part of the structure, statues or balbal to the east, traces of animal bones, fragments of ceramics, and other material finds (*Fig. 5. 3–4*). The only complete find at Har Uzur is a knife (*Fig. 5. 5*),

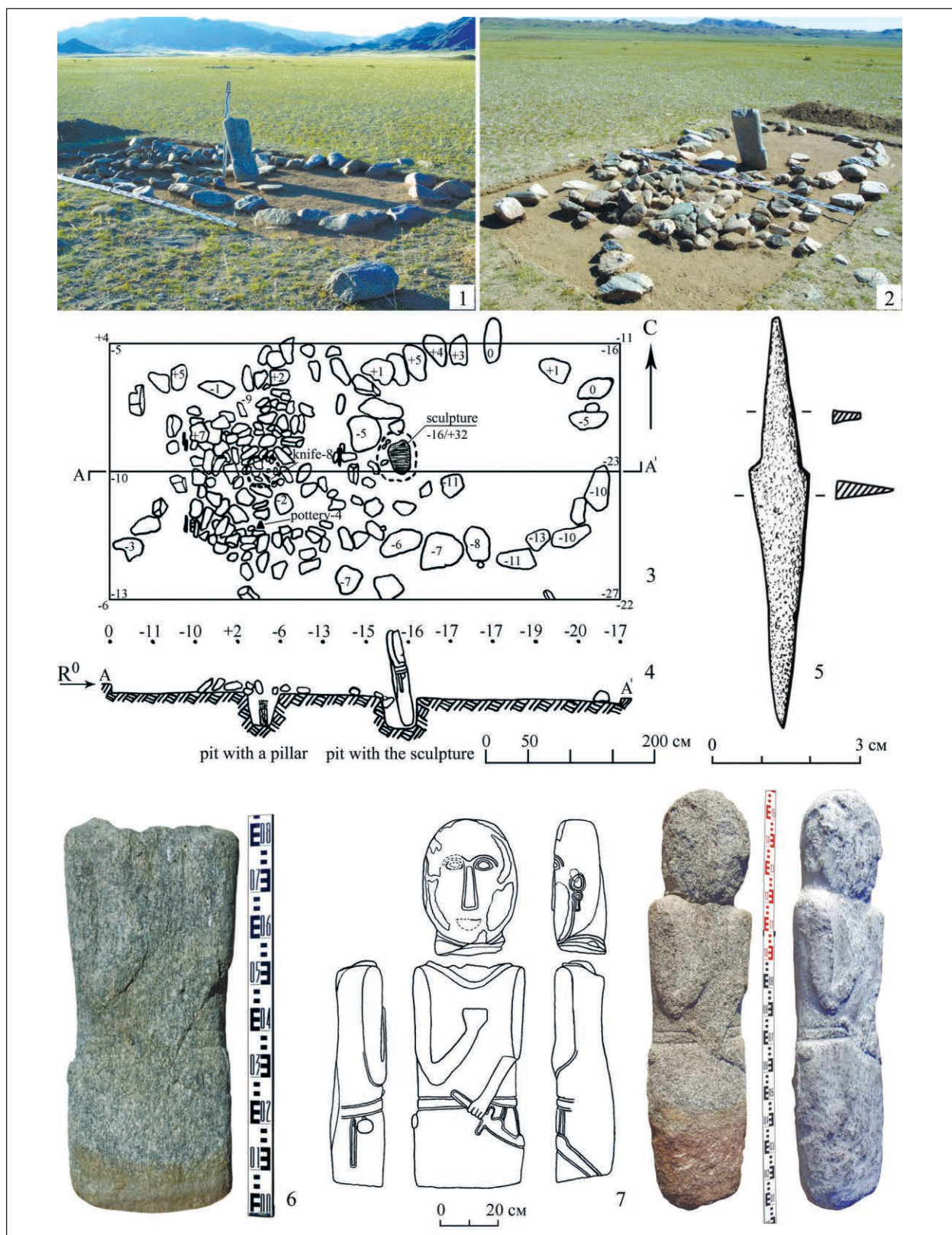


Fig. 4. Bayan-Bulag-I complex. 1: General view of the complex, photo from the south-east; 2: General view of the complex, photo from the southwest; 3-4: General plan and section of the structure; 5: Iron knife from the enclosure; 6-7: Stone sculpture

Рис. 4. Комплекс Баян-Булаг-I. 1: Общий вид комплекса, фото с юго-востока; 2: Общий вид комплекса, фото с юго-запада; 3-4: Общий план и разрез сооружения; 5: Железный нож из оградки; 6-7: Каменное изваяние

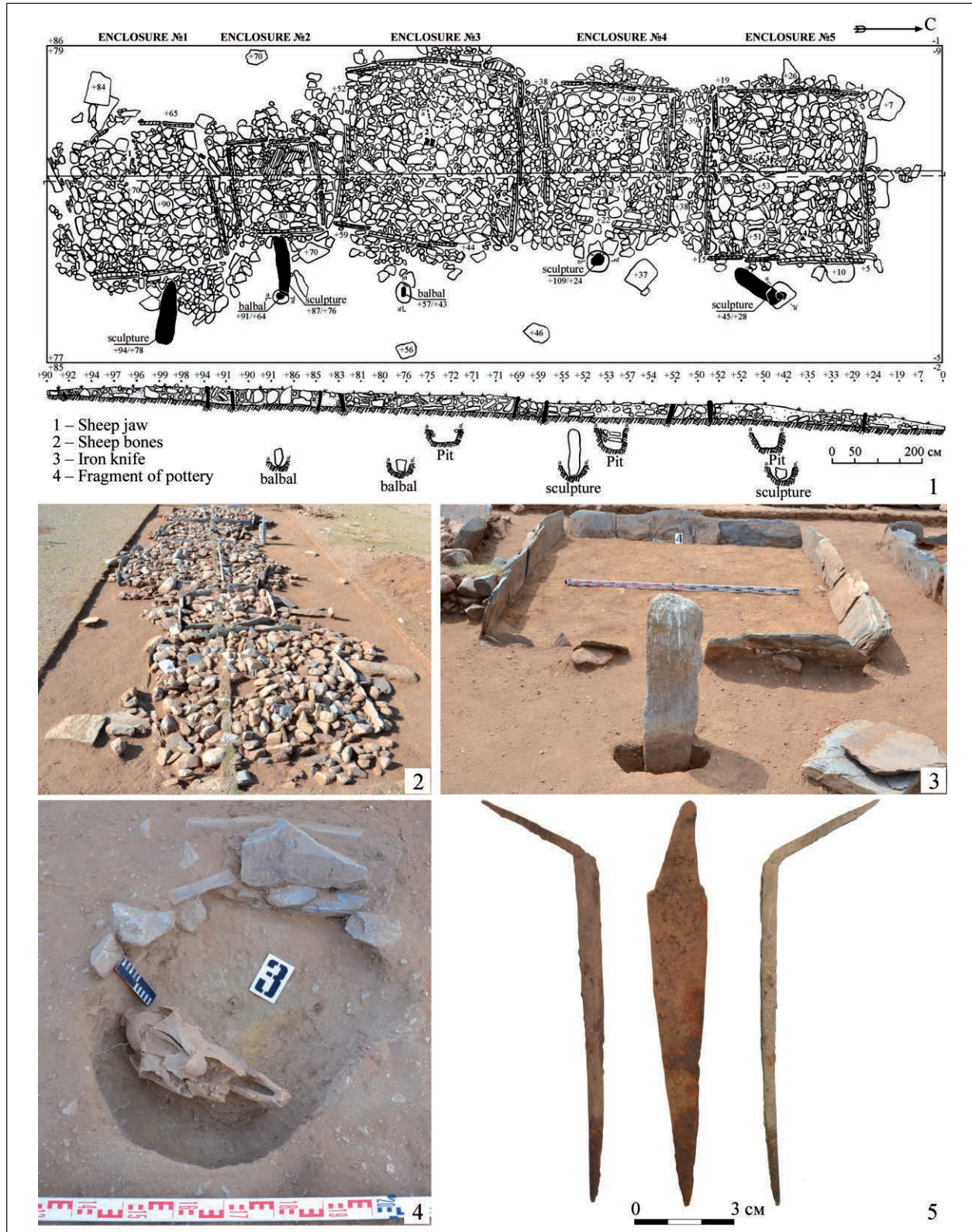


Fig. 5. Har Uzur-I Complex. 1: The general plan of the complex; 2: View of the complex from the south; 3: View of enclosure no. 4 and the statue after removing the internal components, photo from the east; 4: Horse skull from the central part of enclosure no. 3; 5: Iron knife from enclosure no. 5

Рис. 5. Комплекс Хар узуур-1. 1: Общий план комплекса; 2: Вид комплекса с юга; 3: Вид оградки №4 и изваяния после снятия внутреннего заполнения, фото с востока; 4: Череп лошади из центральной части оградки № 3; 5: Железный нож из оградки № 5

which is typologically similar to the knife from the Bayan-Bulag-II complex, but only slightly larger.

An example of the adjacent enclosures constructed at different times can be found at one of the sites excavated by the Buyant expedition – the Biyreg complex in the Khovd Aimag (*Fig. 6*). Soon after runic inscriptions were discovered on the enclosure, the slab with runic inscription was taken to Khovd Museum (*Fig. 6. 1–3*). Then in 2014, the complex was completely excavated. The result shows that the site included two adjacent quadrangular enclosures situated between 0.45 m and 0.75 m apart. Both structures had been badly damaged (*Fig. 6. 4–6*). Embossed images of animals were found on one of the slabs of enclosure no. 2. No other structures and material finds were found.

The most important find is the runic inscription discovered on one of the slabs of enclosure no. 1 (*Fig. 6. 1–3*). A separate publication has been devoted to the analysis of this find. Judging by the available information, the inscription on the slab from Biyreg is among the best preserved for studying the „South Yenisei” alphabet; existing inscriptions are either badly preserved or have been poorly studied.

The analysis of the recorded characteristics of the enclosures of the Biyreg complex allows us to

make a conclusion about the time difference between enclosure no. 1 and enclosure no. 2. First, it should be noted that the structures have different orientations, and are therefore not aligned. Significant differences are also observed in the structure of the walls of the enclosures. Enclosure no. 1 is made of many slabs, which is a characteristic of earlier sites of the time of the First Turkic Khaganate. Enclosure no. 2 had a base consisting of only four large slabs; this structural design became widespread in the construction of Turkic enclosures during the Second East Turkic Khaganate. These features suggest that enclosure no. 1 was built first, enclosure no. 2 was then built next to it no earlier than at the turn of the 7th–8th centuries. A runic inscription, tamga and the image of a goat were applied supposedly by those who constructed enclosure no. 2 to the slab of the northern wall of enclosure no. 1 probably around the same time. Due to the lack of materials for dating, the remaining Turkic complexes investigated by the Buyant expedition can be dated broadly to the second half of the 6th – first half of the 8th centuries AD. Further analysis of these structures and comparison with existing sites allow us to trace the architectural variability of nomads’ ritual practices during this period.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

One of the key issues in Turkic Archaeology of Inner Asia is related to the interpretation of the „*ogradki*” enclosures and their accompanying structures (sculptures, stelae, *balbals*, altars, etc.). Currently, Turkic ritual complexes (enclosures with sculptures and *balbals*) are considered by most archaeologists as „commemorative” structures. Russian researchers are consistent proponents of this view. V. D. Kubarev has also adhered to this point of view. However, he has also remarked in a number of his articles that it is impossible to state unequivocally that all enclosures were designated „commemorative” structures, and more excavated materials are required to reasonably resolve this issue.

Alternative interpretations of the Turkic enclosures have been presented by other researchers. Some relied mainly on contradictory information from Chinese written sources and regarded these structures as burial sites. Others suggested that Tur-

nic enclosures have a combined funeral and commemorative function.

V. A. Mogilnikov has a special point of view. He suggested that some of these structures functioned as „symbolic” burial sites – cenotaphs. This thesis has been extensively discussed by the authors of this article in other publications. The authors argue that this interpretation is most valid for early complexes in the history of the Inner Asian Turks, when prototypes of these funeral and commemorative rituals were first created.

Analysis of the new materials obtained from the excavations of the Turkic enclosures of the Mongolian Altai allows us to return to the issue of the functional purpose of these structures. First, it must be emphasized that no traces of human burial, including remains of inhumation, burnt, and calcined bones have been found at these complexes. However, Turkic kurgans with „standard” burials as well as

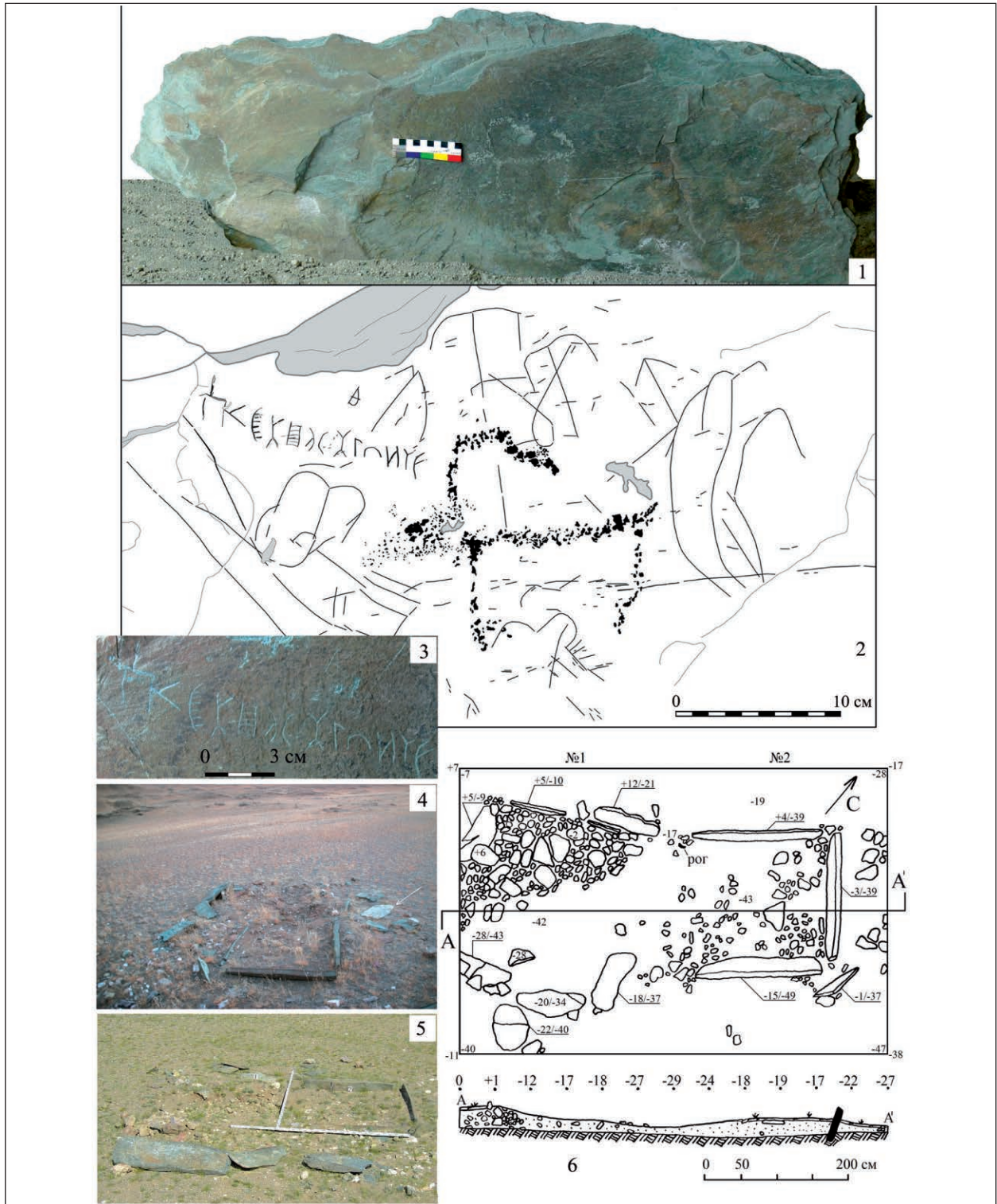


Fig. 6. Biyrэг Complex. 1: View of a part of a slab from enclosure no. 1; 2: The image and the runic inscription on the slab from enclosure no. 1; 3: Runic inscription on the slab from enclosure no. 1; 4: View of the destroyed enclosures before excavation, photo from the northeast (the arrow points to the slab with the runic inscriptions); 5: View of enclosures no. 1 and 2 before the excavations, photo from the south-east; 6: Plan and section of enclosures

Рис. 6. Комплекс Бийрэг. 1: Вид части плиты из оградки №1; 2: Изображения и руническая надпись на плите из оградки №1; 3: Руническая надпись на плите из оградки №1; 4: Вид разрушенных оградок до раскопок, фото с северо-востока (стрелка указывает на плиту с надписями); 5: Вид оградок №1 и 2 до раскопок, фото с юго-востока; 6: План и разрез оградок

rock burials are known and have been excavated in the territory of the Mongolian Altai.

However, there are insufficient grounds to classify all excavated Turkic enclosures of the Mongolian Altai as cenotaphs. There is almost no known cenotaphs dated to the early history of the Turks. As far as we know, to date, only one site has been excavated in Mongolia, which dates to the period between mid-6th centuries and the end of the 6th centuries AD. It is hopeful that further excavations in the Mongolian Altai will provide new materials to address this research problem.

Considering the new fieldwork evidence and existing research on Turkic enclosures in the territory of the Mongolian Altai, the most plausible explanation at present is that these structures were used for ritual activities. This is evidenced by traces of

funeral feast, the presence of bones of domestic animals and special structures (cists, pits) where various rituals could be carried out. At the same time, the available materials show the evolution of the ritual traditions of nomads. Commemorative structures are characterized by particular design features at each stage of the development of the Turkic archaeological culture. For example, the cist is characteristic of the early period. Statues are not typically found in early enclosures whereas in the later period, there are statues with images. Expanding our knowledge base of enclosures through further future excavations will make it possible to debate and elaborate on the existing ideas about the specifics of the traditions of the nomads of this part of Inner Asia.

CONCLUSION

The information presented in this paper demonstrates a promising area of archaeological research in the study of the medieval archaeology of Mongolia. A targeted study of the Turkic enclosures accompanied by the collection of new excavated materials will allow future research to reach a new level of interpretation that could address existing inquiries. It is especially important to obtain more precise dates for most of the monuments that have been documented. This requires the extensive application of radiocarbon dating at these archaeological sites. Unfortunately, this is not often possible due to the lack of organic materials discovered in many of the enclosures. However, in complexes where such materials are present (coal, animal bones, wood residues, etc.), it is necessary to carry out targeted sampling. AMS-dating allow obtaining the desired result with a very small sample. In particular, such work was implemented in an US-Mongolian expedition in the area of Billuut (on the northern side of Lake Hoton, Zengel Somon of the Bayan-Ulgiy Aimag) in the Mongolian Altai where the team in-

vestigated five Turkic ritual complexes. In some of these enclosures, charcoal, birch bark and other organic remains were found and several radiocarbon dates were obtained to determine the chronology of the five complexes. They were assigned to the time of the First Turkic Khaganate and the Second East Turkic Khaganate (5th–8th centuries AD). In recent years such work has been carried out by the authors of this article as part of the continuation of research on the Turkic enclosures of the Mongolian Altai. It is the establishment of dating that will allow a detailed presentation of the evolution of ritual practice that is outlined in this article. Adopting varied approaches to the study of each excavated Turkic enclosure will reveal data for developing new interpretations and reviewing existing debates. Large-scale spatial studies of Turkic enclosures in Mongolia will allow us to better trace the distribution pattern of the structures of each phase of the history of the Turks. The existing studies of excavated complexes in Southern Siberia will also provide valuable reference materials.

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ТЮРКСКИЕ ОГРАДКИ МОНГОЛЬСКОГО АЛТАЯ: НОВЫЕ ДАННЫЕ О ТРАДИЦИЯХ РИТУАЛЬНЫХ ПРАКТИК КОЧЕВНИКОВ В РАННЕМ СРЕДНЕВЕКОВЬЕ

АЛЕКСЕЙ АЛЕКСЕЕВИЧ ТИШКИН – НИКОЛАЙ НИКОЛАЕВИЧ СЕРЕГИН

В период с 2007 по 2015 г. участниками совместной Буянтской российско-монгольской экспедиции, организованной несколькими университетами России и Монголии, проводились планомерные исследования тюркских «поминальных» комплексов (VI–VIII вв. н.э.) на территории Монгольского Алтая. В научной литературе подобные объекты обозначаются как «оградки» в связи с их характерной конструкцией из плит, поставленных на ребро. В процессе полевых работ зафиксировано несколько сотен таких сооружений, сопровождаемых изваяниями, балбалами и другими объектами. В статье представлены материалы раскопок 27 тюркских оградок, исследованных участниками Буянтской экспедиции в разных частях Монгольского Алтая. Авторами подробно рассмотрены вопросы хронологии обозначенных комплексов на основе анализа направлений эволюции конструктивных особенностей объектов. Представлен опыт интерпретации таких сооружений с учетом всех выявленных характеристик. Большое внимание уделено изучению выявленных каменных изваяний, а также зафиксированной надписи на одной из плит оградок. Перспективы дальнейших исследований тюркских «поминальных» комплексов связаны с широким использованием методов естественных наук, а также проведением целенаправленных полевых работ.