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the Xiongnu elite and Han court. A lacquered box with a Chinese inscription from Barrow No. 7 deserves special attention. This box was found in the western outside corridor as a part of the grave inventory of burial Doll no.2, one of four found in the tomb. The doll was composed of the skull of a baby (some months old) and small lacquered wooden sticks which formed the extremities. Its grave inventory consisted of a belt with iron plaques, a string of beads on the belt, a necklace and Chinese lacquered box. This box was found at a depth of 17 m, where it had been destroyed by the pressure of soil, stones and the settling of logs of the burial chamber. Therefore it is impossible to reconstruct correctly the shape and the size of the box. The outside surface of the box was covered with brown lacquer and ornamented by incised lines and red painted lines. The quatrefoil motif on the center of the cover is very similar to the motif on other Chinese boxes. Inside the box were found two wooden combs, a fragment of a Chinese mirror, a fragment of mica, a small birch-bark container, a set of iron needles and a wooden needle-box.

The Chinese inscription was incised on the outside surface of the box between ornamental incised parallel lines. The characters concentrate in groups separated by a small ornamental zone, but they undoubtedly form one inscription. This inscription is incomplete — the first part of the inscription was destroyed, some other characters are missing as well. The preserved part of the inscription includes the four characters depicted in Fig. 1 on the next page.

The first readable character (after the destroyed part of the box) is 年 (*nian* — "year"). Before the character one can see a horizontal line which in fact is a part of the character of the year of the regnal title. As the regnal titles of the Western Han were

A Chinese Inscription from a Xiongnu Elite Barrow in the Tsaraam Cemetery

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The pastoral herding tribes of the Xiongnu, otherwise known as the Asiatic Huns, dominated in the eastern part of Central Asia during the 2nd century BCE — 2nd century CE. Systematic studies of Xiongnu archaeological sites have been carried out already for more than a century, with significant results for the characterization of settlement complexes and cemeteries. One of the most important excavations in recent years was devoted to an elite Xiongnu burial complex in the Trans-Baikal area (Russia

Federation), near Naushky village in the Tsaraam Valley. Sergei Miniaev and Lidiia Sakharovskaia have written on the excavation there of Barrow No. 7 for this journal, the second part of their report to be found immediately above.

There are a number of Chinese items among the finds. Objects such as the chariot, mirrors, lacquered cups, staff etc. are very important both for chronology of the Xiongnu archeological sites and to illustrate contacts between



Fig. 1. The beginning of the preserved part of the Chinese inscription on the lacquered box from Tsaraam Barrow No. 7.

changed every five years or so, and as the lacquer box does not seem to date from the Eastern Han (when regnal titles lasted for longer periods), this year could be

"second" or "third" or "fifth." This formula [regnal title] [year] is typical at the beginning of inscriptions of this kind.

The name of the master artisan who directed the work in the imperial workshop and the names of the officials who managed and inspected the workshop then follow. The name of each official is preceded by the character 臣 (*chen* – "your servant") which was used in an inscription only when the piece was fit for use by the emperor. From this fact I infer that the inscription started with the characters 乘輿 (*chengyu* – "for use by the emperor") which had been written before the regnal title and year and were destroyed with them.

The two following characters (after "nian") are 考工 (*kao gong* – "imperial workshop"), followed by a sign 二 which indicates that the preceding character (here "gong") is duplicated. Thus this part of the inscription can be read as "kaogong gong." The second "gong" character means here "master artisan." The *kaogong* (考工) workshop, where the box was made was an imperial workshop at the Han capital Chang'an. The two imperial workshops in Chang'an, the Gonggong (供工) and the Kaogong, whose production was in quantity and quality a little inferior to the production of the official Shu and Guanghan workshops of Sichuan, made many pieces to be given as diplomatic presents (Barbieri-Low 2001; Hong 2005). The style of the inscription and of the décor of the Tsaraam box corresponds to the style of the Chang'an Imperial workshops as well. Unfortunately only fifteen pieces with inscriptions coming from the Gonggong or the Kaogong (not including the Tsaraam piece) have been published so far (Hong 2005, pp. 407-408). Their inscription style is different from the official Shu workshop inscriptions found at Noin-Ula.

After the name of the master artisan Shang who made the box (工賞造), the inscription lists the people (functions and names) who managed (*zhu* 主) and inspected (*xing* 省) the workshop. Each name is preceded by the character "chen" (your servant).

[齋(?)] [夫(?)] 臣康 — "[the workshop overseer] your servant Kang,"

掾臣安 — "the lacquer bureau head your servant An." (The names Kang and An were read by Prof. Gao Chongwen.)

Missing characters here could be reconstructed as 齋夫 (*sefu* – "the workshop overseer"). If so, this part of the inscription could be read as:

齋夫臣康 — "the workshop overseer your servant Kang."

Inspected by:

主右丞臣 [...] — "the Assistant Director of the Right your servant [...],"

令臣 [...] — "the Director your servant [...]" and

護工卒史臣尊 — "the Commandery Clerk for Workshop Inspection your servant Zun" (? – I am not certain about the reading of the name).

Thus the Tsaraam inscription can be reconstructed:

[乘輿] [...] [...] 年考工工賞造
齋夫臣康掾臣安主右丞臣 [...]
[...] 令臣 [...] 護工卒史臣尊省 .

It translates:

[Fit for use by the emperor] made in the [?] year of the [?] era] by the master artisan of the Kaogong imperial workshop Shang. Managed by the workshop overseer, your servant Kang; the lacquer bureau head, your servant An. Inspected by the Assistant Director of the Right, your servant [?]; the Director, your servant [?]; and the Commandery Clerk for Workshop Inspection, your servant Zun.

The inscription suggests the following considerations regarding its date. The formulae of the inscription indicate that the piece is probably not earlier than 36-27 BCE. It is in this period, 36-27 BCE, that we first find the distinction between “made” (*zao*), “managed” (*zhu*) and “inspected” (*xing*), as it is written in the inscription. The piece was certainly not made during the reign of Wang Mang (9-23 CE), because during this period the character 主 (*zhu* — “managed by”) was replaced by 掌 (*zhang*). The character “zhu” was used again under the later Han. The style of the painted décor — in particular the rather thin painted outlines and the rather spaced out composition — could indicate a date prior to Wang Mang and the Later Han, when the lines become thicker and the composition more crowded. The incised décor on the Tsaraam box, made of rhombs and small incised vertical lines, is very similar to the décor on a lacquered box dated 4 CE. Yet a similar motif can also be seen on a lacquered box dated 43 BCE (Umehara 1943, Pl. XXVIII, no. 26, and Pl. III, no. 6).

Some fragments of other lacquered pieces were found in the Tsaraam complex, in the northern

corridor of the burial chamber of the central Barrow No. 7 and in the sacrificial burial No. 16. The painted décor on these lacquered pieces is similar to that on lacquered objects manufactured in the official workshops of Sichuan province during the period between 8 BCE and 4 CE. This style was copied by the imperial workshops at the Han capital Chang’an and was maintained there maybe a little longer. Thus, I believe that the period between 8 BCE and 4 CE could be a possible date for the lacquer box from Tsaraam. Of course the date is only a *terminus post quem* for the complex No. 7, since prestigious lacquer pieces could have been preserved for some time as family valuables before being used as grave goods.

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The Tsaraam Valley