

Investigation of a Xiongnu Royal Complex in the Tsaraam Valley

Part 2: The Inventory of Barrow No. 7 and the Chronology of the Site

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During the 1997-2005 field seasons the Trans-Baikal Archaeological Expedition of the Institute of the History of Material Culture, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, investigated a Xiongnu Royal burial complex in the Tsaraam Valley, situated 1.5 km to the south of Naushki village (Buriat Republic, Russian Federation) [Figs. 1, 2]. We published a

of the report, we expand on our earlier description of some of the finds in the central barrow and conclude with a discussion of the chronology of the complex.

Objects Found Inside the Burial Pit: The Chinese Mirror

Fragments of a Chinese bronze mirror [Figs. 3, 4, next page] were found under the logs at the second level of the longitudinal partition in the center of the burial pit, 218 cm below the surface. The ten fragments of the mirror were in the following positions: six lay one above the other and the remaining four alongside of them. Taken together they do not form a complete mirror — its center is only partially preserved —

although they suffice to reconstruct its size and decoration. The diameter is 13 cm; around its edge is a rim 2.1 cm wide and .3 cm thick. The characteristic elements of the decoration make it possible to identify a wide range of analogies and reconstruct the entire decorative scheme.

Apart from the smooth rim, on the reverse surface of a mirror of that type are several concentric ornamental bands. Directly adjoining the rim is a narrow (3 mm) band with a comb-tooth pattern, inside of which is the main ornamental band with images which were separated from the center of the mirror also by a narrow band with a comb-tooth



Fig. 1. View of the excavation of Barrow No. 7 from the north.

preliminary report about the excavation in *The Silk Road* (Miniaev and Sakharovskaia 2006a), where the reader may find site diagrams and information about the construction of the tomb. Its complex structure included a number of vertical partitions and horizontal ceilings or covers. In this, the second part

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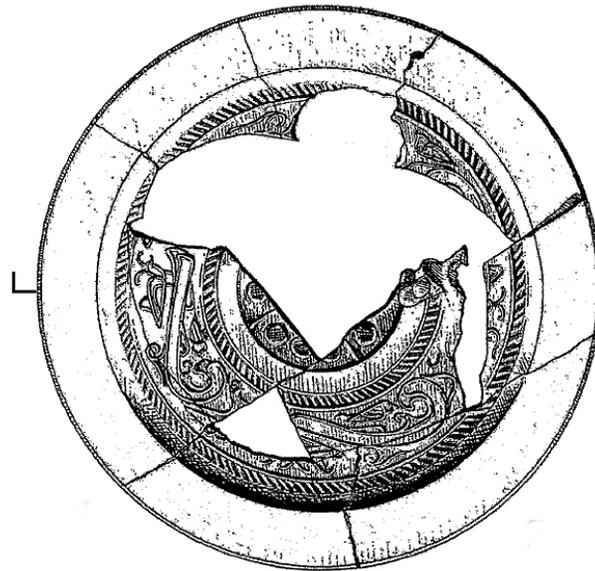
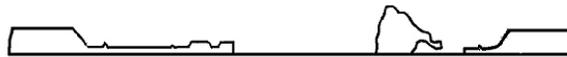
Fig. 1. View of the burial pit of Barrow No. 7 showing intraburial construction.

Figs. 3, 4. The Han mirror found in Barrow No. 7.

pattern. A smooth protruding band 3 mm wide separated the outer bands from the center, where there was a pierced knob for hanging the mirror. Narrow protruding lines divided into four sectors the area around the knob and inner smooth band. In each sector in turn were three round knobs or nipples, the central one of which was connected with the protruding smooth band by three short lines.

The main ornamental band situated between the two narrow bands with the comb-tooth pattern was divided into four sectors by means of small rounded projecting knobs. The area between the knobs was covered by virtually identical compositions, the center of which was a large scroll in the shape of a comma. It is possible that initially this was the depiction of the body of an animal which with time had been transformed into a geometric composition. Above and below this scroll were figures of birds, or, more rarely, other animals.

Mirrors of this type are not uncommon. They are known in museum collections; some examples of such mirrors have been found in archaeological excavations both of the Han Dynasty itself and in Xiongnu excavations of that same period on the territory of Mongolia and Russia. (See, e.g., Tal'ko-Gryntsevich 1999, p. 50, fig. 3ñ;



Chou 2000, p. 39, fig. 20, Cheng and Han 2002, fig. 25:1,2 and fig. 26:1,2; Wenwu 1977, fig. 27:2.) According to the standard classification (Zhongguo tongjing 1997, p. 247) they belong to the group of mirrors "with four nipples

and four S-shaped figures" (or dragons). The given group is dated normally between the 1st century BCE and 1st century CE.

An important characteristic of the mirrors from Xiongnu sites is their fragmentary state. Unlike those in Han burials (and in a rare instance such as the Xiongnu burial at the Tamir site excavated in 2005), the mirrors in most Xiongnu burials are found either in separate fragments or in several pieces of a mirror that had been intentionally broken. Evidence of the intentional breaking of mirrors is seen, for example, in the mirror discovered in a residence in the fortress of Bayan-Under, where it was unearthed along with the iron knife which broke it (Huns 2005, p. 46, fig. 63).

It is very likely that the Tsaraam mirror, initially intact, likewise had been intentionally broken. Traces of scale clearly visible on its surface indicate that the mirror had been broken by means of heating it to a high temperature and then abruptly cooling it, possibly in cold water. After that, some of the fragments were removed and the rest placed under the beams of the longitudinal partition. Removed as a result of this process were the central knob of the mirror, the three nipples dividing the main ornamental zone into parts, and two segments with

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ornament in the form of a central "comma" and adjoining birds. The depiction of a bird above the "comma" in the third section also has been damaged. In essence then, the only remaining complete segment is the fourth one. We note in particular that although the third and fourth segments had been broken into several parts during the ritual, these parts were not removed but placed in the grave pit along with other fragments. At the same time, a small fragment of the mirror with the dividing knob between the third and fourth segments was removed along with two other fragments with nipples. The fragment with a nipple which was placed in the grave pit had first been subjected to strong secondary heating, the result of which was that the knob had melted. The melting of the nipple was a result specifically of that second heating of a separate fragment, since otherwise the adjoining more delicate parts of the mirror also would have melted.

Thus one can hypothesize that during the burial ceremony a special ritual was performed over the mirror, a ritual which possibly was the norm for the burial practices of the Xiongnu more generally. The ritual involved subjecting the mirror to mechanical or heat treatment and breaking it into several fragments. One or several of such fragments accompanied the dead, while other parts of the mirror were removed and possibly preserved by the family or relatives of the deceased in order subsequently to accompany other burials and serve as a kind of sign of recognition upon meeting in the other world. The burial of some parts of the mirror in the grave pit and the removal of others (of analogous design) suggests that such mirrors and the ritual actions performed over them served as a kind of connecting link between the world of the living and the world of the dead, symbolizing in both worlds the unity of the

collective which the deceased had left behind.

Objects Found Inside the Burial Pit: The Chinese Chariot

A Chinese chariot was found in the center of the barrow at a depth of 10.5 – 11 m (Miniaev and Sakharovskaia 2007). To its north, at the wall of the pit about a meter from the incline of the fifth step at a depth of 10 m were the skull, two neck vertebrae and the metapodials of a horse. The arrangement of the chariot's parts suggests that its body had been placed beneath the third cover when the pit was being filled, while the canopy and wheels were found above the stones of the third cover in the center of the barrow and thus must have been located above the level of that ceiling [Fig. 5]. Probably the chariot had been set onto the stones of the fourth cover where it was buried by the filling of the pit as well as by gravel, pebbles, charcoal and slabs of the third ceiling (the canopy and the wheels of the chariot having remained above the latter). When the fill of the pit sank, the parts of the chariot were displaced: in the process, the movement of stone slabs, gravel, and pebbles — acting like millstones — inflicted serious damage. Some time later, the chariot was yet further disturbed by robber passages: the northern passage damaged part of

the harness and frame, while the southern one crossed the presumed location of the seat, in the process demolishing a considerable part of the canopy. Altogether, the parts of the chariot were very poorly preserved: the wooden parts and organic material of the canopy had decayed almost completely, the bronze and iron fastenings of the harness had been severely oxidized and lost their original structure. Here is a description of the preserved parts of the chariot [Fig. 6, next page].

The remains of the canopy were in the center of the pit 4 m from its northern edge above the stones of the third cover. The canopy consisted of a wooden frame, over which some organic material had been stretched. The base of the frame was composed of thin

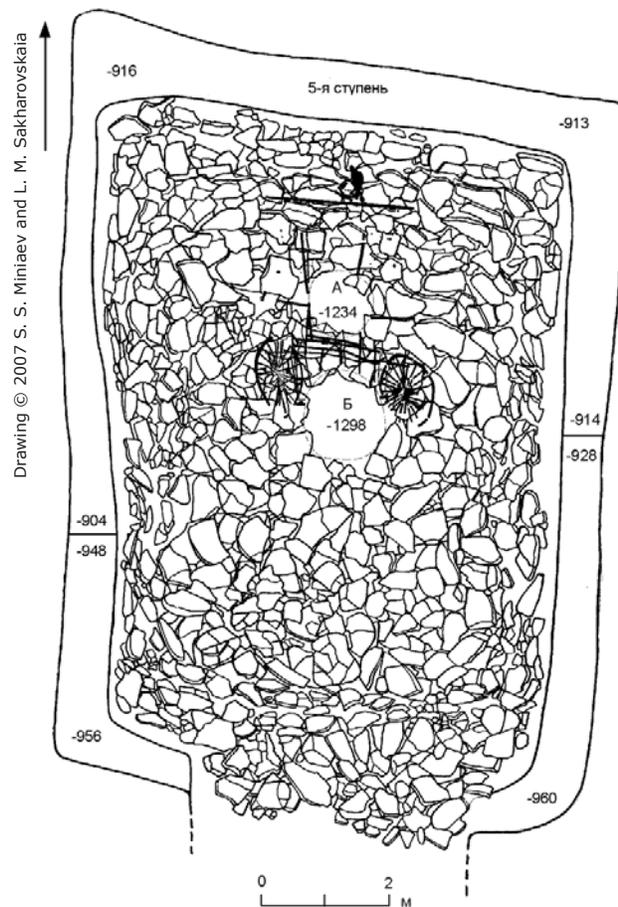


Fig. 5. The remains of the chariot in situ at the level of the fourth cover. A and B are the looters' passages.

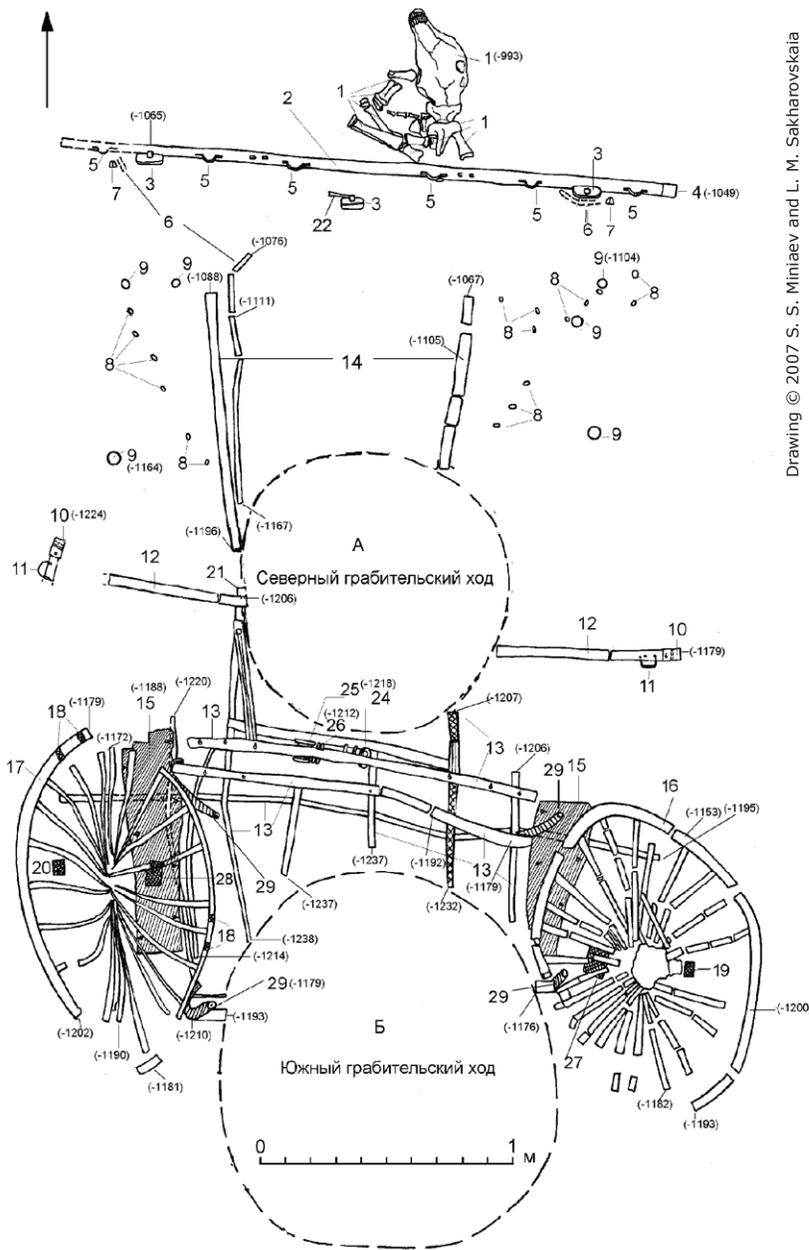


Fig. 6. The remains of the canopy and body of the chariot. Figures in parentheses are depth measurements. 1. Bones of a horse (skull and metapodials). 2. Front yoke-pole. 3. Yoke-heads. 4. Bronze ferrule for front yoke-pole. 5. Bronze arc-shaped harness "rings." 6. Remains of thin round wooden poles. 7. Rectangular iron buckles. 8. Iron plates. 9. Iron rings. 10. Bronze ferrules for rear yoke-pole. 11. Iron rings. 12. Rear yoke-pole. 13. Remains of the lattice-work body of the chariot. 14. Shafts. 15. Elbow-rests for the seat. 16. Eastern wheel. 17. Western wheel. 18. Iron clamps. 19, 20. Small iron bushings. 21. Iron plate. 22. Bones of a lamb. 23. Canopy.

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western edge had been completely destroyed during the collapse of the third cover. The preserved length of the pole was 2.5 m; its diameter was 18–20 cm. A bronze ferrule 10 cm long and 7 cm in diameter was attached to the eastern tip of the pole. The ferrule had completely oxidized and been crushed by the pressure of the fill. Probably a similar ferrule had been attached to the western, destroyed end of the pole. Five pairs of square mortises measuring 3 × 1.5 cm for attaching parts of the harness were discernible. They began 12 cm from the eastern tip of the yoke-pole and ran along its entire length at intervals of 40–45 cm (the mortises in each pair were spaced 4 cm apart). Near the mortises were fragments of bronze — probably traces of arc-shaped harness "rings" or guides which had been set into the mortises.

wooden strips about 4 cm wide set crosswise, to which were attached a number of thick arched twigs. The base included as well thinner twigs 1–1.5 cm in diameter, arrayed radially from the center of the frame. The organic cover of the frame was duofold, its upper layer consisting of a dark organic material (leather or felt), below which there was a thin layer of cloth. This canopy covering was fixed to the strips and twigs of the frame with thin, iron L-shaped

nails. The inside of the canopy was coated with red lacquer, which preserved traces of geometric ornament rendered in white, brown and dark-red paints [Fig. 7, next page]. A robber trench had destroyed the southern part of the canopy.

The *front yoke-pole* of the chariot was found on the layer of pebbles and charcoal under the stones of the third cover of the pit, 2.5 m north of the canopy. Its

Remains of yoke-heads were uncovered at the western and eastern sides of the yoke-pole, as well as in its center. These consisted of boards 4 cm thick, 8 cm wide, and with the preserved length of 25–30 cm. The position of the western yoke-head *in situ* suggests that the heads were attached to the yoke-pole by means of special incisions. The lower parts of the yoke-heads were not preserved. In the upper part of the western and central yoke-heads there was a cylindrical

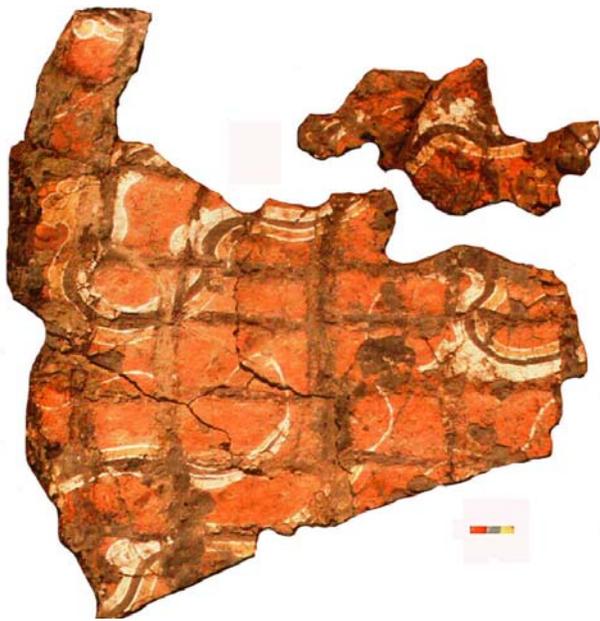


Fig. 7. The lacquered inside of the canopy of the chariot.

projection on which a bronze ferrule had been placed. On the eastern head, this projection had been broken off in antiquity but its traces were discernible in the upper part of the head. The entire surface of the yoke-pole and yoke-heads was coated with black lacquer, over which a geometrical pattern was drawn in white and red paint. Stylistically, fragments of this pattern are similar to that on the inside of the canopy of the chariot.

The two *wooden shafts* of the chariot were beneath the front yoke-pole lying parallel to each other in the N-S direction and 60 cm apart. They were very poorly preserved: their southern parts had been cut off by the robber trench; the preserved length was 95–100 cm. Traces of lacquer and a pattern rendered in red and white paints were visible on the surface of the shafts. Near the eastern shaft at a distance of 10 cm from it was a line of iron oval plates with holes on the shorter sides. Probably these had once been sewn onto the leather straps of the harness or the reins. Below this line of plates, 30 cm to the east, was an iron ring 6.5 cm in diameter.

the center of which the iron hub of the axle had been placed. The wheels were considerably damaged by the pressure of the filling of the pit and ceilings. The wheels were 120 cm in diameter and had 22 spokes whose thickness was 3–4 cm. Remains of a number of iron shackles were traceable around the felloe of the western wheel. Tiny fragments of red and white paint were preserved on the felloe and spokes. The felloe and the adjoining parts of the spokes were painted red to a length of 10–12 cm, whereas the rest of the spokes was painted white. Practically nothing of the central parts of the wheels survives; nevertheless traces of red paint detected there suggest that the central disc of the wheel into which the spokes had been inserted was painted red.

Small iron hubs with two projections were uncovered directly outside of the wheels in the pebble layer which underlay the third ceiling. There were traces of wood on the outer side of the hubs. Large iron hubs with three projections on the outside of each were found under the wheels in the pebble layer of the third ceiling. These also bore traces of

The remains of the *wooden wheels* were located 1 m south of the shafts, on the stones of the third ceiling. The lower part of the western wheel was in the layer of pebbles and gravel underlying that ceiling. The wheels were spaced 2 m from one another, each consisting of a felloe, spokes and, possibly, a central disc into which the ends of the spokes had been inserted and in

wood on the outer side, whereas in the center of the large and small hubs no traces of wood have been detected. The iron nails with which the hubs were fixed to the wooden cores of the wheels were preserved on the outer side of the larger hubs.

The rear yoke-pole. This is an arbitrary designation for this part of the chariot, since its real purpose still is not clear. A number of facts suggest, however, that it is not the axle of the chariot, viz.:

- the difference between the diameter of the pole and the inner diameter of the large iron hubs into which the axle must have been inserted;
- the separate position of the bronze axle-caps (as described below), which were usually put onto the ends of the axle and whose diameter differs from that of the rear pole (which furthermore had its own bronze caps).

In its shape and dimensions (7 cm in diameter and about 3 m long) the "rear yoke-pole" resembled the front pole. The largest part of the pole had been cut off by the northern robber trench; only its eastern and western ends were preserved. Bronze caps 5.5 cm in diameter and 7 cm long were placed on the tips of the pole. On the surface of the caps was a small cylindrical flange. Two arc-shaped iron fastenings were driven into the yoke-pole 3–4 cm from these caps. Possibly some elements of the harness (straps or ropes) once passed through these fastenings. The surface of the rear yoke-pole showed traces of lacquer and a pattern rendered in white paint.

Wooden elbow-rests of the seat. After the wheels had been removed, directly below them were found remains of some pinewood blocks which possibly were once the elbow-rests of the seat. These consisted of boards 3–4 cm thick, decayed and compressed by the powerful pressure of the filling of the pit.

The elbow-rests presumably measured 25 × 50 cm. A painted geometrical design could be made out on their lacquered surface.

The body of the chariot. After the wheels had been cleared and removed, remains of a trellised frame of the chariot and bronze axle-terminals were uncovered in the space between the wheels and the remains of the chariot shafts. The remains of the frame consisted of several wooden laths, 2-3 cm. thick, from which the trellised part of the body had been constructed. The laths were attached to each other with iron nails where they crossed. The northern and southern parts of the trellised frame of the chariot, as well as, perhaps, the entire seat had been destroyed by the robber trenches. North of the trellised frame, under its wooden laths, were two cylindrical bronze axle-caps at whose bases were circular flanges [Fig. 8]. The axle-caps were 10 cm long and 12 cm in diameter in their base and 5 cm in diameter on the top. In the lower part of the caps there were rectangular holes measuring 3 × 1.5 cm for insertion of the pins. In their upper part they had L-shaped projections probably to fix the straps of the harness. The iron pins, found lying between the caps, were 10 cm long with a rectangular section and a ring or eye on one end.

The absence of the wheel axle and the unusual position of the

pair of axle-caps (beneath the trellised body) suggest that the chariot had been placed in the tomb in a disassembled and possibly incomplete state. It is also noteworthy that the presence of three yoke-heads implies the use of three horses in the team. However, as mentioned above, only the skull, two cervical vertebra and metapodials of a single horse were discovered. This horse was evidently laid into the tomb according to the principle "a part instead of the whole."

The construction of this chariot and its decorations have very close parallels among Chinese chariots of the Han period. The most comprehensive recent study of these chariots distinguishes a number of features very similar to those of the chariot from Tsaraam (Wang 1997). Like the Han examples, the Tsaraam chariot has a canopy consisting of a wooden framework covered by some organic material, four wooden posts supporting the canopy, a trellised seat and wooden "elbow-rests." The body of the chariot and the painting of the wheels are remarkably closely paralleled in a recently restored chariot from the burial of the famous Han general Huoqubing who fought against the Xiongnu (Cooke 2000). The use of two yoke-shafts on the Tsaraam chariot suggests it was originally intended for a team of three horses, whereas the single central shaft typical of the Han chariots implies an even number of horses on the team.

Written sources often attest that chariots were among the gifts offered by the Han court to the first-rank Xiongnu nobility. Thus in 51 BCE shanyü Huhanye received along with other gifts a

"chariot with a seat" (Taskin 1968-1973, Vol. 2, p. 35). Subsequently, as mentioned in the *Hanshu*, on more than one occasion the shanyü was given presents similar to those he received the first time (Ibid., pp. 36, 37, 51). During the epoch of Wang Mang (9-23 CE), who intended to divide the Xiongnu into separate nomadic bands and to set his own chief at the head of each, one of the Xiongnu deserters, the right *liyü-wang* Xian was awarded the title of *Xiao-shanyü* and, among other presents, given a "chariot with a seat and a chariot with a drum" (Ibid., p. 57). In 50 CE the shanyü of the southern Xiongnu, Bee (grandson of Huhanye ruling under the same name as his grandfather) was granted "a carriage with a seat and an umbrella of feathers and a team of four richly harnessed horses" (Ibid., p. 72). In 143 CE the southern shanyü Hulanzhuo in the throne hall of the imperial palace was granted along with other gifts "a chariot with a black top harnessed to a team of four horses, a chariot with a drum, a chariot with a seat"; the shanyü's wives were granted "two carriages decorated with gold and brocade and draught horses" (Ibid., p. 94).

It is thus quite possible that the chariot found in Tsaraam was also a gift from the Han court to one of the representatives of the Xiongnu elite. However, judging by the evidence from the *Hanshu* we might connect the chariot with a different event. In Wang Mang's reign, the above-mentioned Xiao-shanyü's son, Deng, who was then at the imperial court as a hostage, was executed because of his father's desertion to the northern Xiongnu and his brother's frequent raids on the borderlands. At the demand of the Xiongnu the corpses of Deng and some other noblemen executed together with him were returned to their homeland for burial. The bodies they were "laid into chariots" for transport (Ibid., p. 62). We may not rule out that later these



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Fig. 8. Bronze axle caps and iron pins.

chariots were buried in the tombs together with other funerary offerings.

It should be emphasized that in any case the records of chariots either as gifts or in connection with funerary ceremonies concern only the first-rank Xiongnu nobility, i.e. shanyüs, their wives, or sons. This fact is a further confirmation of the probability that Barrow No. 7 at Tsaraam is a burial of a representative of the Xiongnu elite, possibly a shanyü. Parts of chariots were found also in the Xiongnu royal tombs at Noin-Ula, but unfortunately the archaeological record from that site is insufficiently precise to permit reconstructing their details.

Objects Found in the Burial Chamber

The bulk of the burial goods were located in the corridors between the walls of the chamber, the frame, and the coffin. Several sets of harness (iron bits, cheek-pieces, harness buckles) and two burial dolls were found in the western external corridor. Iron hooks, found in the walls of the external chamber suggest that originally the bridle arrays had hung on such hooks and ended up on the floor of the chamber only after its deformation.

The doll found in the center of the western corridor (the northern of the two, to which we have given the provisional designation "Doll No.1") was formed in the following fashion [Fig. 9]. The head of the doll was made of a human skull, which, judging by the baby teeth, was that of a 2-4-year-old child. On the skull of the doll were six braids of black stiff hair, which probably had been attached to the skull using some kind of glue. Along with the braids on the skull were two round beads made of gold foil and inlaid with turquoise. Two more braids were in front and in back of the skull and two braids in the waist region along with iron plaques. Wooden sticks covered with red lacquer formed the extremities of the doll.

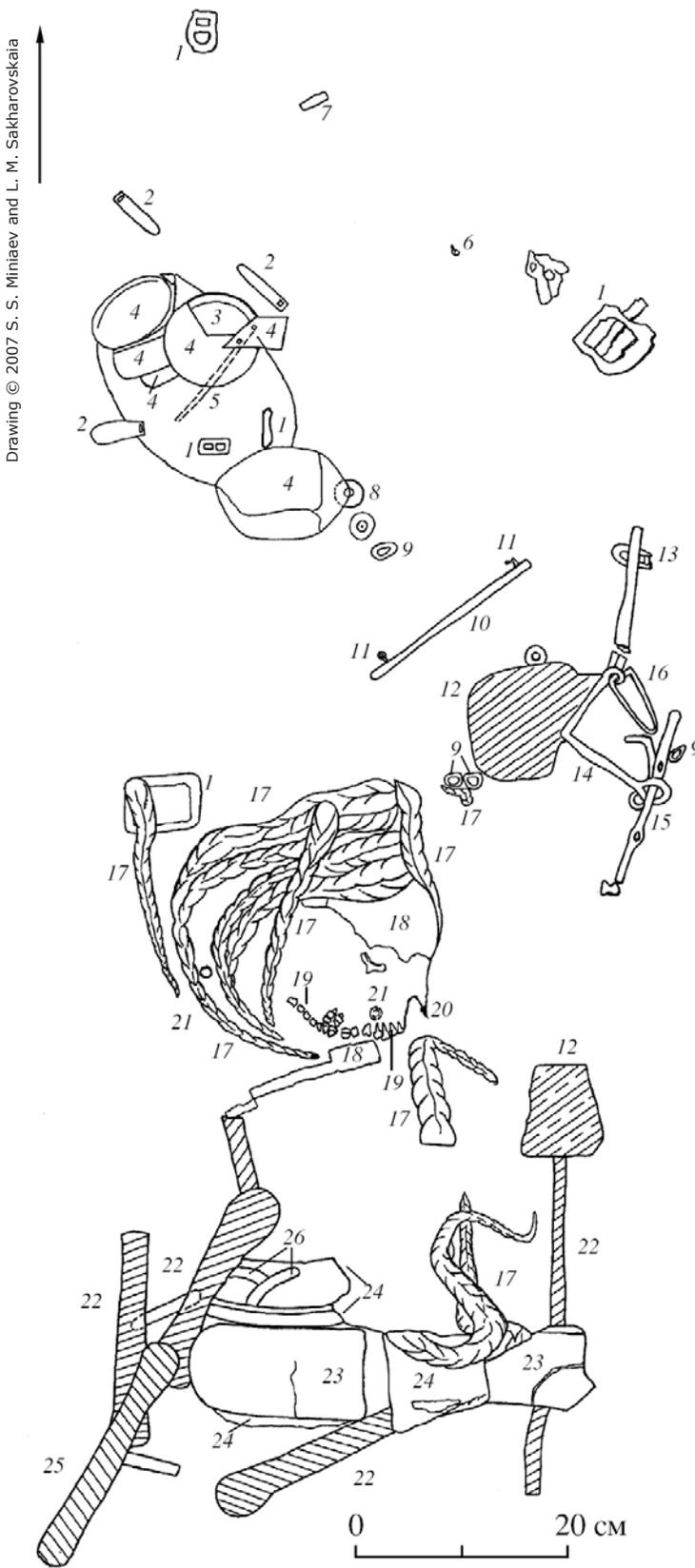


Fig. 9. Drawing of Doll No. 1 in situ in the western corridor.



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Fig. 10. Remains of birchbark and lacquered boxes found with Doll No. 1.

The burial inventory of Doll No.1 consisted of two separate iron belt plaques measuring 15 x 6 cm (the leather strap of the belt was preserved along with the plaques) and [Fig. 10] a wooden lacquered box placed behind the head of the doll next to which were four birchbark containers (possibly they were originally inside the box). The box was covered in red lacquer and along the edges decorated with a red lacquer design along a band of yellow lacquer. Under the box was a hair pin of some kind of organic material (possibly tortoise shell).



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Fig. 12. Carving on birchbark disk, possibly depicting a coin.

Under the birchbark containers was a birch bark circle, on which was found a fragment of a Chinese bronze mirror. On one of the birchbark containers were unique drawings [Fig. 11], showing the



Fig. 11. Carved image on birchbark of trellised tents in nomad camp. Photo © 2007 Miniaev & Sakharovskaia

Xiongnu camp with carts and yurts placed on carriers and [Fig. 12] the profile of a person in a helmet — possibly a copy of a depiction on some coin.

In front and behind the skull of the doll were several iron buckles, a bit, cheek pieces and fragments of iron objects. Probably they were not connected to the inventory of the doll but originally had hung on the wall of the chamber and ended up on the floor after its deformation.

The other doll found in the western corridor, given the provisional designation "Doll No.

2," was formed in an analogous fashion [Fig. 13, next page]. It lay one meter to the south of Doll No.1. The core of Doll No. 2 was also a human skull which had completely disintegrated. Only small baby teeth were preserved, on the basis of which it was determined that the skull might have belonged to a child only a few months old. In the vicinity of the skull was a short braid of stiff black hair. The modeling of the upper extremities could not be determined. The lower extremities were made of thin iron plates, placed in a wooden sheath and covered with red lacquer.

In the vicinity of the neck of Doll No. 2 was a necklace of glass, turquoise, flourite and large crystal beads. In the vicinity of the waist of the doll were two corroded iron plates measuring 20 x 11 cm lying on the leather strap of a belt, which was preserved only in fragments and in places had been covered with red lacquer. A loop of beads, consisting of now almost completely scattered glass beads, had been suspended from the belt. There were as well some heart-shaped flourite and amber beads.

Below the waist of Doll No. 2 under the bottom beam of the outer chamber were remains of a crushed wooden lacquered vessel with geometric ornament. Inside the vessel were fragments of a bronze mirror, a piece of mica, two wooden combs and a collection of iron needles in a wooden holster. On the exterior of the vessel was an inscription in ideograms, which Prof. Michèle Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens analyzes in a separate article below.

The finds in the eastern external corridor were practically the same as those in the western one. Here there were also sets of bridles

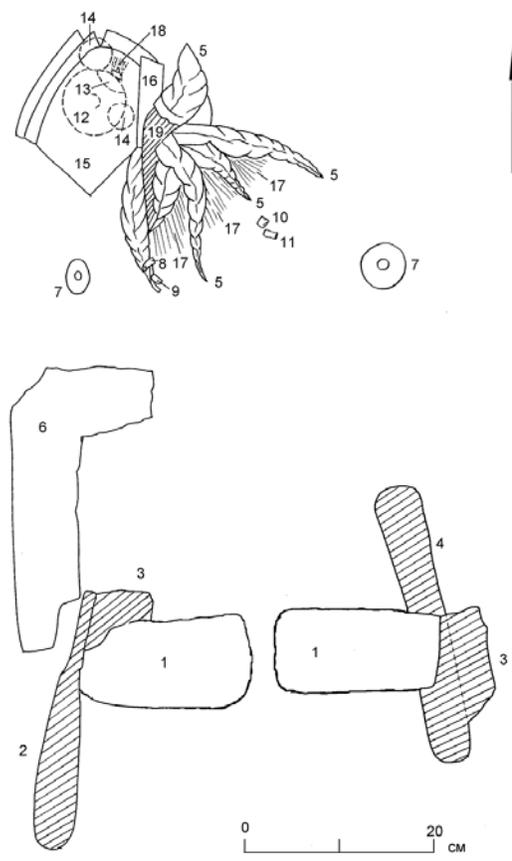
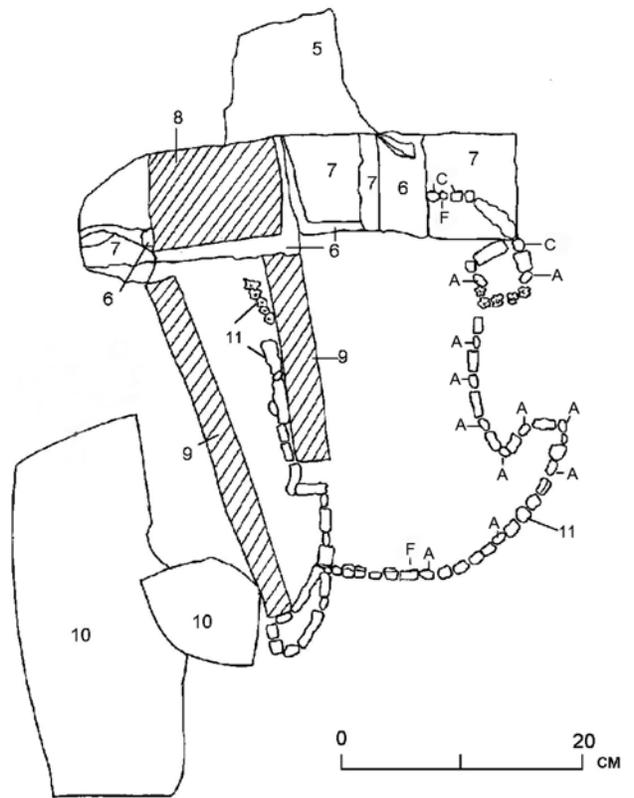
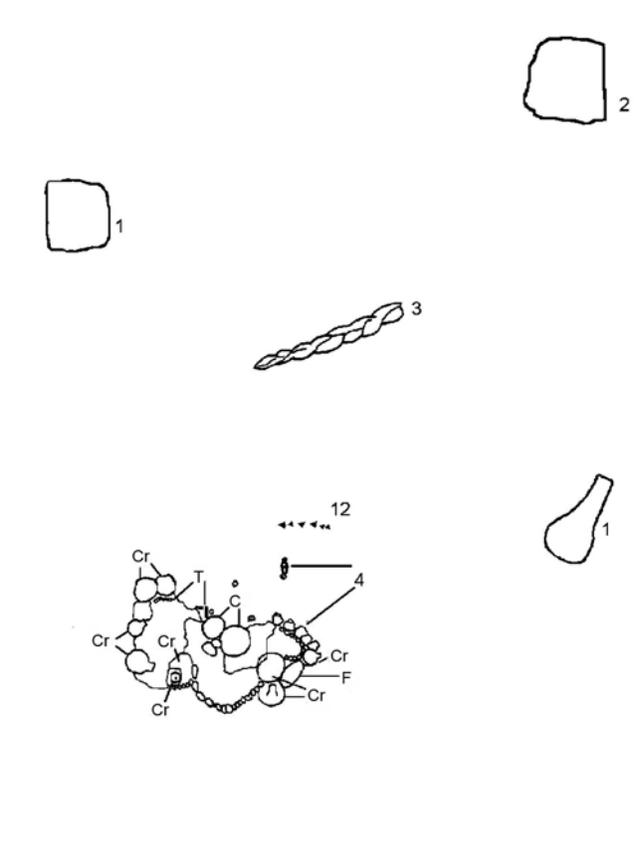


Fig. 14 (above). Drawing of Doll No. 3 in situ in eastern corridor. 1. Iron buckles. 2. Iron plate covered with red lacquer. 3. Fragments of red lacquer. 4. Wooden object covered with red lacquer. 5. Braids. 6. Fragment of clothes (?) (woolen cloth and organic material — either fur or felt). 7. Pendants made from wall of a lacquered wooden cup. 8, 10. Turquoise beads. 9. Glass bead. 11. Amber bead. 12. Fragments of a bronze Chinese mirror. 13. Birchbark case for mirror. 14. Birchbark containers. 15. Fragments of a lacquered wooden cup. 16. Fragment of felt. 17. Hair. 18. Wooden comb. 19. Silk.

Fig. 13 (left). Drawing of Doll No. 2 in situ in the western corridor. 1. Iron objects. 2. Fragment of felt (?). 3. Fragment of a braid. 4. A group of beads (a necklace?) (C—carnelian; T—turquoise; Cr—crystal; F—flourite; the rest—glass). 5. Leather covered with red lacquer. 6. Leather. 7. Iron plates. 8. Wooden lacquered plate. 9. Iron plates, covered with red lacquer. 10. Fragments of a lacquered wooden container with an inscription. 11. String of beads (C—carnelian, F—flourite, A—amber, the rest—glass). 12. Human teeth.



Fig. 15. Drawing of a bronze plaque depicting a running mountain goat.

(consisting of iron bits, cheekpieces and buckles) and burial dolls. The burial doll which lay in the center of the eastern corridor to the south of the pieces of harness and which was given the provisional designation "Doll No. 3" was formed in the same way as the dolls in the western corridor [Fig. 14, previous page]. The skull of the doll had practically completely disintegrated. In the vicinity of the skull lay several braids of stiff black hair, on the ends of which were little turquoise, glass and amber beads. Lacquered wooden sticks formed the extremities. Near the neck on both right and left in the vicinity



Fig. 16. Silver horse harness chest medallion (phalar) depicting a mountain goat.

of the skull were remains of two round pendants of wood covered with lacquer which possibly had been formed from the walls of wooden lacquered cups.

large fragment of a Chinese mirror.

The fourth doll apparently had been removed by the robbers; only its feet remained.

But for two bronze coffin handles, found near its southwestern and southeastern corners, there were practically no artifacts in the western internal corridor:

The finds in the eastern internal corridor were confined to its southern part, since robbers had destroyed the northern part. These finds included sets of harnesses — iron bits, cheekplates, bronze harness-plates, bronze plaques with depictions of a running goat [Fig. 15]; silver chest medallions for horses (phalars) with images of mountain goats [Fig. 16] — arrowheads, a lacquered wooden staff, a lacquered wooden cup and a lacquered wooden quiver with iron arrowheads.

To a substantial degree, the entrance of a looter had destroyed the northern external corridor, but fragments of ceramics and lacquered wooden objects were found there. Nothing was found in the southern external corridor, but in that corridor, attached to the interior wall of the external chamber, were remains of a woolen carpet which had been destroyed by the shifting of the beams of the chamber. In the

At the waist of the doll were also two wide corroded iron buckles measuring 19 x 12 cm. Behind the head of the doll were remains of a wooden object (possibly a box), on which was a small birchbark container and a



Fig. 17. White jade plaques.

southern internal corridor were a flat iron ring and two iron fasteners.

The northern section of the coffin had been destroyed by robbers, but jade plaques of armor and a jade diadem were found there (Fig. 17). In the preserved



Fig. 18. Gold image of a satyr from a buckle.



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Fig. 19. Fragment of a ritual sword and inlaid gold objects in situ.

southern section of the coffin were the remains of a covering of some organic material (felt or compressed fur), two iron buckles covered in gold foil and depicting a satyr [Fig. 18, previous page], and two gold fastenings. Next to the remains of a ritual sword were three gold objects decorated with turquoise inlay [Fig. 19]. Two of them may be finials; the third, with the image of a mountain goat is a small flask [Fig. 20].

The Date of the Complex

We consider the central barrow and sacrificial burials as a unique

burial complex, put in place during one funerary ceremony, in one day or a maximum of several days. The basis for determining the chronology of the complex is the inscription on the lacquered box found near Doll No. 2, fragments of four Chinese mirrors, and ¹⁴C dates.

Prof. Michèle Pirazzolli-t'Serstevens has concluded in her article published separately here that the inscription dates no earlier than 36-27 BCE and might date between 8 BCE and 4 CE (that is, immediately before the Wang Mang period). However, she cautions that these dates are at best a *terminus ante quem*, since the box with the inscription might have been placed in the grave long after it had been manufactured. We can add that fragments of a lacquered cup with the same design as in Noin-Ula were found in the northern corridor in the central Barrow No. 7 and in the Sacrificial Burial No. 16. It is very probable that the fragments can be

dated from the same period — from the end of the 1st century BCE to the beginning of the 1st century CE (cf. Louis 2007).

As Guolong Lai recently cautioned in this journal, dating on the basis of Chinese mirrors can be problematic, given the fact that too many examples in museum collections lack details about their provenance (Lai 2006). With that caution in mind, we nonetheless feel that on the basis of modern classification (Zhongguo tongjing 1997) all four mirrors whose fragments were found in the central barrow in the burial pit and amid grave goods of the dolls can be dated between the end of the Western Han and early Eastern Han periods, that is not earlier than the 1st century BCE.

Eight ¹⁴C dates were obtained in laboratory of the Institute of the History of Material Culture [see table, next page]. While the dates fall within a broad range, calibration of values by the program OxCal suggests (with a probability 95.4 %) that the burials were made in approximately the period period 30 - 120 CE.

In sum then, we know that the complex is no earlier than about the last third of the first century BCE and very likely is to be dated in the first century CE.

Conclusion

The application of modern archaeological techniques to the excavation of Complex No. 7 in the Tsaraam Valley has yielded entirely new information about Xiongnu mortuary practice, the construction of such barrows, and Xiongnu social structure. New examples of Xiongnu art and material culture were discovered. Yet much needs to be done to complete the study. Conservation of the finds is the first priority. Study of the material must include DNA and morphological analysis of the skeletal remains and faunal and botanical samples and

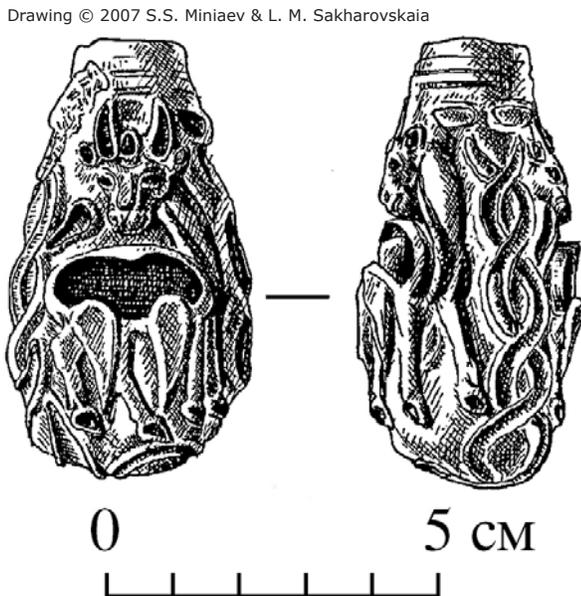


Fig. 20. Drawing of the gold flask shown in Fig. 19, showing the image of a mountain goat.

Burial	Sample number	Original data, BP	1 sigma	2 sigma
Barrow No. 7 Logs of the fence in entry to the burial pit	Le-5930	2120±30	182BCE - 74BCE	192BCE - 52BCE
Barrow No.7 Charcoal between outside chamber and a wall of the burial pit	Le-7510	2130 ±20	200BCE-135BCE	350BCE-50 BCE
Barrow No. 7 The chariot	Le-7680	1925±40	50CE-130CE	40BCE-180CE
Sacrificial Burial No. 12, the coffin	Le-5917	2050±25	56BCE-2CE	110BCE-14CE
No. 13, the coffin	Le-5918	1945±25	24CE-116CE	18CE-122CE
No. 14, the coffin	Le-5919	1900±25	82CE-130CE	70CE-210CE
No. 10. the coffin	Le-5920	2070±40	97BCE-41BCE	153BCE-3BCE
No. 15. the coffin	Le-5921	1990±30	2CE-66CE	38BCE-66CE

component analysis of ceramic and metal objects and organic materials such as the birchbark containers, lacquerware, and textiles. The result should provide impressive new archaeological evidence concerning the organization, chronology, and regional interaction of the Xiongnu nomadic polity. This research will complement on-going projects in Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang and will contribute to the developing theories on complex organization among nomadic groups.

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Editor's note: Material in this article has appeared in various forms both in Russian and in English on Dr. Miniaev's website and in Russian in leading archaeological journals (see citations below). The version

presented here combines several of these sources, with some of the material being made available in English for the first time.

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Long-time collaborators and co-authors **Sergei Miniaev** and **Lidiia Sakharovskaia** are among the leading experts on the archaeology of the Xiongnu. Miniaev is the founding editor of a Russian monograph series on Xiongnu archaeology, *Arkheologicheskie pamiatniki Siunnu*. He will be spending part of 2008 at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. Additional material on their excavations may be found at <<http://xiongnu.atspace.com/>>. Contact e-mail: <ssmin@yandex.ru>.

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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