

About the Authors

The authors are all members of the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology of the National University of Mongolia. Prof. **Navaan Dorjpagma** is the department's senior professor. He received his initial training in Archaeology at Moscow State University and for many decades worked in the Mongolian Academy of Sciences. His specialty is Bronze Age archaeology of Eastern Mongolia; he has published three monographs and over 200 scholarly articles. Prof. **Tumen Dashvereg** likewise received her degrees from Russian institutions and since 1995 has chaired her department. She has held numerous visiting appointments at distinguished foreign universities and recently completed a lecture tour in the United States and Canada, sponsored by the Silkroad Foundation. Her publications in her specialization of paleoanthropology include three books and some 90 articles. Her e-mail is <tumen@mun.edu.mn>. She, Prof. Navaan, and the third co-author, Prof. **M. Erdene** of her department, presented a paper in April 2006 at the 19th Annual C14 Conference (held at Oxford) on the carbon 14 dating of the Tavan Tolgoi site.

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Tombs of Chingisids Are Still Being Found...

An Interview with Senior Archaeologist, Professor Dorjpagma Navaan

Interviewed by Shirchin Baatar on August 3, 2005.

We are meeting again after exactly one year. I heard that you made number of discoveries during the most recent season. Can you tell us about your new discoveries as well as older ones?

Last year, during the expedition organized by the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology of the National University of Mongolia, we found some interesting discoveries related to the thirteenth century. We informed the public and planned to continue work in 2005. We excavated three burials in the hope of finding some more interesting and valuable items. Our hopes were met.



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Fig. 1. Prof. Navaan discussing his 2005 excavations. Looking on is Prof. Al Dien (Stanford), who lectured for the Silkroad Foundation's summer institute in Mongolia.

Thank you for the good news. First you found a burial of a female aristocrat. Exactly what kinds of things were with her? What was the position of the body?

First we went to a place named Tavan Tolgoi in Ongon sum, Sukhbaatar aimag (Fig. 1, next page). When we were exploring there, I found some graves on the slope of Dund Ovoot mountain. Because of the external structure of the burials I assumed that they



Fig. 2. Map showing location of Tavan Tolgoi and Sharga Mountain.

could be from the Xiongnu period. But there was doubt. The Xiongnu usually did not bury their people on higher mountain slopes, which is where those burials were located. In order to find out the reason, we decided to excavate the first grave. When we excavated the northeast grave we found the remains of a woman with a horse. There had not been any looting. It was a great find. There were gold rings on both hands, and inside of the rings were hidden images of white falcons. That image gave us direct evidence that this burial is related to Chingis Khan's family. Therefore we decided to continue research and excavation in this area. Now we have a long period of research work ahead.

Were there other interesting finds besides those two rings with the white falcons? How about saddles, bridles, clothes and other items? Were there other important anthropological signs?

The woman was there with the horse, but the horse was without a head (Fig. 3). Mongols have a tradition of placing horse heads on high mountains as offerings. The horse had a saddle, and the upper side of the saddle, both front and back, was covered with well-designed and carefully crafted gold. The saddle-cloth, girth and other parts

of the saddle were in exactly their original position. All the material of the saddle had very skillfully-executed patterns and needlework. The saddle also had iron stirrups. The woman not only had the gold rings but also a bronze mirror, silver bracelets on each arm and a gold necklace with an expensive turquoise inlay. All of them were crafted with the most wonderful designs.

This means that during that period Mongols made bracelets of silver. How are you preserving those finds? Did you trace the designs?

We are keeping all rare materials under strong security at our university. We continue the restoration of those items, but it

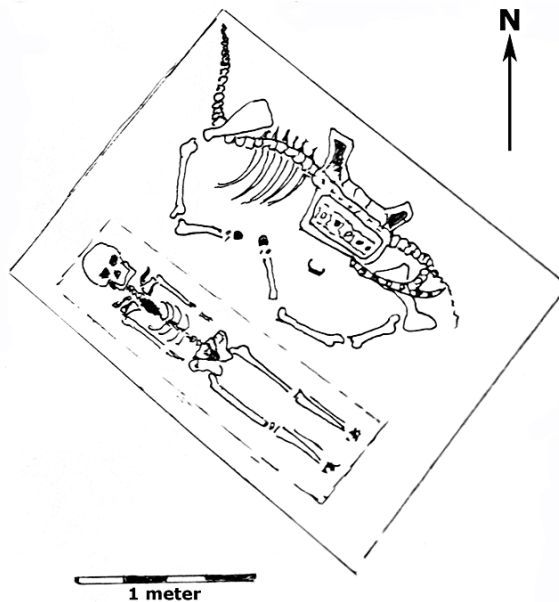


Fig. 3. Drawing of burial in Tomb No. 1 (?), Tavan Tolgoi.

is not an easy task. We need more time. Part of the careful study of the saddle components is to make accurate drawings. Once restored and carefully studied, all the items will appear in a book.

What will be the title of your book? Will it be published soon?

Because those discoveries were made in Tavan Tolgoi of Ongon sum, we will name the book *Ongon Tavan Tolgoi*. I will include all materials related to the thirteenth century in this book and publish it in Mongolian and English. The book will be published in 2006 before the 800th anniversary of the founding of Chingis Khan's Mongolian empire.

I heard that you also found a noble's hat with a gold jins (a small, round item worn on a top of a hat to indicate rank). Was it found in the first excavation?

The second burial was at the foot of the woman's burial. First we thought that it would be the burial of her son or someone related to her. The excavation revealed that it had been looted a long time ago. We are lucky because the looter did not also loot the woman's grave. Examination of the skeleton's anatomy showed that the second grave contained the body of a man, who was buried with his horse. The horse still had its head. Therefore the man probably was a very important aristocrat. The most important discovery from that tomb was a gold artifact with pearl inlay, placed on a lotus. It was wrapped in silk and held in the left hand of the man, which was under his back. It could be a *jins* or a religious or decorative item. I think that the important thing is that it is related to the period when Buddhism first spread to Mongolia. The fact that the man held this artifact tightly and it was hidden under his back is very interesting. We are continuing to study this.

That man's horse was without any saddle. Is it because the tomb was looted? How do you know the tomb was looted?



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Fig. 4. Gold hat decorations and earrings from Tavan Tolgoi Tomb No. 5.

It is easy to recognize when other people have disturbed an archaeological monument. The skeleton was moved a little. But I think the horse originally was without a saddle. There should have been other valuable artifacts in that tomb. But since there were none, we think it was looted. Since the *jins*-like artifact was under the man's back, looters probably did not notice it. Another interesting discovery in the tomb was a stirrup.

Last year, winter arrived after you had dug two tombs. Did you dig other tombs this year? How did you find the other important discoveries?

There were other tombs located near the two we excavated last year. Therefore we had an ambitious goal for this year. We chose three tombs and excavated them. We excavated them in a different order compared to last year's excavation and numbered them 5, 6 and 7. A lot of expensive and valuable artifacts were found in those three tombs. In the fifth tomb there was a woman younger than 20. On her body and near her head there were a number of gold items. Because she was a young woman she was dressed in a fancy manner. For

example there was a gold crown, a jade belt-fastener with gold inlay and a lapis lazuli plate, a gold ring, a gold hair-clip with various patterns, a necklace with a round gold box and a gold thunderbolt (Figs. 4, 5, 6). The



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Fig. 5. Gilded pectoral (crown?), Tavan Tolgoi Tomb No. 5.

most interesting discovery was the gold thunderbolt that she held in her hand. The thunderbolt is



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Fig. 6. Gold thunderbolt (vajra) found in Tavan Tolgoi Tomb No. 5.

related to Buddhism. We should therefore consider that at this time the Mongols already had adopted Buddhism. In last year's excavation we also found a bone thunderbolt with carving on it.

Was the young woman alone in the tomb? Did you find a horse or saddle with her?

Probably that girl was a beloved daughter of an important aristocrat. A horse was with her, and there was a beautifully designed saddle sheathed in gold and with dragon-shaped ornaments (Fig. 7, next page). We have started to restore that magnificent creation. It has a great many well-crafted carvings. Ethnographically it is an important monument of oriental culture. The dragon ornamentation is very artistic. The dragon is the sky animal. A person who used a gold saddle with a sky animal had to be a high nobleman. In Mongolian archaeological history there have never been such discoveries before, and they prove that we have a proud culture and heritage.

I saw pictures of Mongolian rulers' saddles. There are two kinds of



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Fig. 7. Gold foil saddle decoration with dragon design. Tavan Tolgoi Tomb No. 5.

them. But, this one is not comparable to either of them. This saddle is wonderful. Can you talk about Tombs Nos. 6 and 7?

We found a gold earring from Tomb No. 6. That man's tomb looks as though it had been disturbed by someone. The coffin's design is very good. It seems that the coffin's wood is not from native trees but could have been brought from the south. The inside layer of the coffin was some kind of high quality silky material. We found a big piece from that material and now are working to restore it. There was no horse in that tomb. The anthropological material of Tomb No. 7 proved that it was a man. We found in that tomb some gold objects with figurative designs, possibly used as clothing decorations. This tomb also had been robbed by someone.

So, there were five tombs, two containing women and three of them men. All the men's tombs were looted but the women's ones were not. That makes me think that someone who knew about the tombs robbed them soon after the burials.

We also think so. Usually many expensive items were placed with noblemen. Those robbers would have known that.

Are there any other tombs? Will you continue your research in this area?

There are many other tombs in Dund Ovoot. They are close to

each other. Also there are some other, quite different, tombs that we have excavated 200-300 meters away. The tombs that contained the gold artifacts were tombs of aristocrats, but the latter ones were for ordinary people. Some of them contained horses, but there were no saddles. They might be warriors' tombs. Some artifacts could prove this point. In last year's excavation we found a bronze earring from a poor woman's tomb. So these were different kinds of peoples, and we found different artifacts. As many as five or six other big tombs that could contain a lot of gold items existed in the area where we first excavated. We will study those tombs in 2006. There are two or three hills about 1 km beyond Dund Ovoot. One hill has about ten, another one has seven or eight tombs. The place is called Tavan Tolgoi (Five Hills) because there are several hills side by side. It contains monuments from the thirteenth century and also even from the Hun period. We will apply to the Mongolian Government to protect this place.

Now people know about Tavan Tolgoi. Will people go there by themselves and rob those tombs...?

Ongon sum of Sukhbaatar aimag is the closest sum to the border. The place that we conducted our excavation is in only 10 km away from the border. There are three army units near this place; so the protection is good. The border guards always watch this place. It

is clear what cars are coming and who is visiting. The local people also act as guards. These people have sharp eyes and they know who is coming, where they stay, whether they come with horse or car, etc. When even ordinary citizens are so watchful, then any casual robber can't get to this place.

What good people. I am proud of them. I have another question. If this place is only 10 km from the border, then that means that perhaps some other tombs could be on the other side of the border. Are you interested in this, and have you crossed to the other side?

I have not. Because it is a border, there is no chance to cross it. We can't go there, and other people can't come from that side. Therefore we have little information about the other side of the border. Usually there is not much information about archaeological monuments in China. It seems that they are hiding their discoveries. Therefore I can't tell whether they either have or do not have similar monuments. When we look from Tavan Tolgoi to the south, there is no mountain, it is all steppe — as we say in Mongolian, a mirror. If there are no mountains, rocks or stones, people can't find materials for burials. Stones are the most important material for funerals; therefore I think there are not many tombs. To the west and east of Tavan Tolgoi there is a series of hills with lots of rocks. That area is very good place for burials. Also

there is a marble portrait of a king and a queen in Tavan Tolgoi. Those tombs could be related to this portrait.

Could you tell us more about this marble stone portrait? When was it done? Have scholars studied it?

The stone portrait of a king and a queen from Tavan Tolgoi were published in a book a long time ago. During the 1920s, the Russian scholar, V. A. Kazakevich, studied it. The Mongolian scholar, Bayaraa, also thoroughly studied it. He wrote a book called *A Stone Portrait of Eastern Mongolia* and defended his Ph.D. on this topic. In this book Dr. Bayaraa wrote that the 'King and Queen from Eastern Mongolia are from the thirteenth century; these were Chingis Khan's famous kings.'

You found thirteenth-century artifacts in the tombs near this stone portrait. That means that you proved Dr. Bayaraa's thesis.

You are saying that I proved it. However, I can't claim that, because we did not prove that this portrait is related to those tombs. There are two more tombs alongside the stone portrait. After excavating those tombs we can prove whether the Tavan Tolgoi artifacts are related to the portrait or not.

Why haven't you excavated these two tombs yet?

We are planning to excavate them in 2006. After this excavation we can tell whether the tombs and the portrait are from same period.

How big are these portraits? Are they tombstones or carved on stones? Are they different from Turkish era tombstones?

The eastern Mongolian stone portrait is a tombstone that has a picture of a sitting man — his whole face and clothes are carved in the stone. It is broken, and the head is cut from the body. It is

totally different from Turkic tombstones. Dr. Bayaraa explained that these stones belong to the Mongolian period.

So many gold artifacts were found from this area. Is there a high possibility that those tombs are related to the stone portraits?

It could be. The tombs beside the king and the queen had been dug before. Even though they have been looted we hope there will be some discoveries. Those discoveries will tell us many things.

Were there any books? If there were any sutras found, that could be very interesting.

No. We did not find any book-related items. But all of these monuments are 'books' themselves.

In the young woman's burial you found some red-brownish powder. This woman seems to be a beloved princess of an important khan. Could this powder help establish her genealogy?

Maybe this was a treasured medicine. We haven't determined the chemical ingredients of this powder.

You told me that you found a woman's shoe. In which tomb did you find it? In the rich woman's tomb or a poorer person's tomb?

This year's excavation gave us very interesting information. We found some more of the same type of tombs in Asga sum, Sukhbaatar aimag, which is located 200 km to the north of Tavan Tolgoi. The place name is Sharga Mountain. The external structure of the tombs is the same as in the Tavan Tolgoi tombs. We found similar gold items there. We also found a woman's shoe which has a beautiful leather cover with patterns. We conserving it and working to restore it.

How many tombs did you excavate in Sharga Mountain?

We excavated three tombs and made various discoveries. Some of them are a little different from the Tavan Tolgoi discoveries. We found there a sheep marrowbone. Mongols use marrows for specially esteemed occasions. During the lunar new year's celebrations, we put out marrow for offerings. This discovery will tell us much about Mongolian customs.

Do the gold artifacts from Sharga Mountain have different designs from the Tavan Tolgoi ones?

There is no big difference. We found a gold decoration from Sharga Mountain which was very similar to the hat decoration found at Tavan Tolgoi. That hat decoration was a little different from previous gold crowns. It has a heart-shaped turquoise inlay on all four sides. It has many different patterns. Even though these artifacts were found 200 km from each other, they are very similar. One could even say that the same smith made them. So, those items surely belong to same period.

We have been looking for Chingisid tombs in the Khentii Mountain range for a long time, but did we find them in Sukhbaatar aimag?

These tombs are definitely related to the Chingisids. Or very close to Chingis Khan or some later descendants. Perhaps they are not the direct descendants of Chingis Khan. Anyway, they were people who worshiped and honored Chingis Khan's white falcon.

When the Mongolian Great Khan period ended, most khans lived behind the Great Wall. And many of them lived in today's Sukhbaatar and Dornod aimags. Therefore these tombs could be related to the southern Yuan Dynasty. The most important proof of this theory is that these artifacts are related to the spread of Hinayana Buddhism. These golden artifacts could be related to Chingis Khan and his descendants. Therefore I think these tombs

belong to the later period of the Great Mongol Empire. What do you think?

I agree with you 100 percent. Dr. Bayaraa studied the tombstones in eastern Mongolia and hypothesized that they are from Qubilai's period. This might be true. Many khans were influenced by the culture to the east and brought silk and other materials from there. These monuments tell us about the cultural relations that developed at this time. So, those could be the tombs of lesser khans, perhaps Qubilai's descendants.

Because I am interested in Mongolian anthropology, I have a good collection of materials on Mongolian anthropology and traditional culture. I search for materials that are published abroad about Mongolian culture. I have seen many artifacts with different designs, shapes and patterns. The monuments that you found are more skilfully decorated than they are. I think your discoveries can change Mongolian anthropology and archaeology. The young woman's saddle is simply wonderful and incomparable. I wish you success in your studies. Your book will surprise the whole world. Thank you very much.

Translated by M. Saruul-Erdene from the original published in the *Zamdaan Journal* 23 (2005).

News about Collections

The August Hermann Francke and Hans Körber Collection: Archaeological Finds from Khotan in the Munich State Museum of Ethnography

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Gronau-Epe/Westfalen (Germany)

Unknown to a larger public there is a significant collection of archaeological finds from Khotan in the State Museum of Ethnography in Munich, Germany. It is the third largest collection of archaeological objects in Germany from Eastern Central Asia (Xinjiang Autonomous Region, China). The largest is the Turfan Collection of the Königlich-Preussische Turfan-Expeditionen (1902–1914), brought together by the German ethnographers and archaeologists Albert Grünwedel and Albert von LeCoq and now housed in the Museum für Indische Kunst in Berlin. Grünwedel and von LeCoq mainly worked at sites on the northern route of the Silk Roads between Kumtura, Kucha and Turfan itself. The second largest collection of such finds is the Emil Trinkler Collection in the Übersee-Museum, Bremen, collected on the southern Silk Road at Khotan in 1928 by the German geographer Emil Trinkler. Unlike the Francke-Körber Collection, the other two have widely been studied and published (see References).

The Protestant missionary and tibetologist August Hermann Francke (1870–1930) and the sinologist Hans Körber assembled their collection in 1914, shortly before the outbreak of World War I. Both were sent out by the German indologist Lucian Scherman, then the leading Director of the Königlich Bayerisches Museum für Ethnographie in Munich. The vicissitudes of the War and the subsequent fate of all three men help to explain why the collection

was never properly catalogued and published.

Dr. Francke was a well-known tibetologist who had previously worked for the Archaeological Survey of India in Ladakh and published two volumes on his research there. He also contributed transcriptions and translations of Tibetan manuscripts to Sir Marc Aurel Stein's *Ancient Khotan* of 1907. Probably this was the reason Lucian Scherman chose him to collect archaeological objects in the



Fig. 1. Sherd of a dark-green hard-glazed jar showing the head of a camel. Yotkan, near Khotan, 6th-7th c. CE. Cat. no. FK 249. Photo by S. Autrum-Mulzer, Negative No. 18213, copyright © Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, München, 2006.