

## **Issyk mound: ritual, art and society**

Crowded funeral procession slowly moves to the burial site. Priests carry a stretcher with the body of the deceased soldier, ritual vessels and vessels with food. Relatives, soldiers, tribesmen follow with endless stream...burial structure is ready and waiting for clergy, when the body will be transferred to them.

Deceased covered with rich robe – he belonged to the nobility. These clothes warrior wore during the receptions and ceremonial parades. On the head – high sagittal cap, fastened under the chin, adorned with gold buckles and plates. On the earlobe gold earring with beading and pendants of turquoise and on the neck is gold torque. Body covered with short caftan, completely sheathed with gold plaques. There were two gold rings. Caftan belted with heavy typesetting belt buckles sparkling sixteen massive-lining. Iron sword sheathed in red overlaid with gold plates was hung on the right side. He was dressed on tight pants tucked into boots with high tops, decorated with curly golden plaques.

Finally, the funeral procession reaches the ultimate goal. Mourners stay at the top. Warrior's body placed in the hole. The priests placed on the floor the vessels and cover the camera logs. Thousands of tribesmen poured huge burial mound...

In our time, one of these mounds, which is situated 50 km east of Almaty, was named Issyk (Akishev, 1978). Thirty years ago, Kazakh scientists, archaeologists discovered the "gold" person. It became a sensation of the century.

In the 8<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC on the territory of Central Asia and Kazakhstan was inhabited by tribes known under the collective name "Saka". Herodotus and other ancient writers called them Asian Scythians, differing from the European Scythians. Sakas tribes were contemporaries of the Persians of Cyrus and Darius I, the Greek era of Alexander the Great. In archaeological science there are many versions of the settlement on the lands of modern Sakas Zhetisu / Semirechie. According to one of them, the south of Kazakhstan was inhabited by Sakas-tigrahauda. Amazing finding in Issyk mound for the first time demonstrated a high and largely distinct culture of this nation. Despite of that in the historiography there is a viewpoint that nomads had low level socio-economic and cultural life still exist in the historiography. It is based on a number of reasons.

One of them is poor knowledge on the history of our ancestors. For a long time (and in a certain extent till today) Asia remained a distant and mysterious. Secondly, the research was based on comparison of the past with yesterday. And it will certainly lead to erroneous point of view on the level of development of ancient societies.

The reason for the fall of the later nomads was military and economic expansion, foreign aggression and violent internal strife, which lasted almost seven years.

Centuries of internal and external shocks led to the best pastures and water sources, traditional ways of migrations and trade expensive were captured, a poor contact and communication with the agricultural centers and cities. As a result of sharply reduced the number of livestock, agriculture went into decline, which inevitably led to disastrous consequences. In 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries European scholars, travelers, missionaries caught nomadic society on the brink of death and of a kind, bright and lush crops - only relics.

Finding in Issyk mound also a monument of writing - the oldest in Central Asia and Kazakhstan - Sakas put society on a par with his contemporary societies of Eurasia with the highly social and economic relations and constitution. Currently, there are several options for decryption Issyk writing made on the basis of Sogdian-Aramaic and ancient Turkic alphabets. Aramaic letter in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC was the international language of the peoples of the Ancient East. In a multi-ethnic Persian Empire (6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) Aramaic letter was the official bureaucratic language. At that time there were local dialects. Sogdian-Aramaic script was spread in the eastern part of the Persian state. Paleographically it belonged to the ancient Turkic runes.

The name of Sakas-tigrahauda was mentioned on the inscription of Darius 1's tomb in the Naksh-i-Rustam gorge. The inscription "Saka-tigrahauda" on the relief was given as an explanatory figure of a warrior in a pointed cap. The most detailed and chronologically earlier data contained in a lengthy Behistun inscription dedicated to the glorification of the same Darius 1: «I went to Sakas country beyond the sea, they wore cap with a sharp design ... And their first, most of them by name Skunha led ... to me".

Behistun inscription was supplemented by relief, where in front of Darius there was eight tied hands.

The last one of among of them - the leader with (70 cm) height pointed cap and beneath it the inscription: "This Skunha, Sak".

When Herodotus mentioned about Saks-tigrahauda, he called them "ortokaribantii", i.e. wearing a sharp hat.

The palace of Xerxes at Persepolis has the image of Sakas on relief 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. It is interesting because Saka warriors look like Mongoloids. However, we know that in Central Asia and Kazakhstan at that time most of the population had a pronounced Caucasoid features. The exceptions were obviously some tribes inhabiting most likely Northern Kyrgyzstan and southern Kazakhstan: it is here as a result of racial mixing occurred early mongolization of population. Anthropological definition, buried in a mound of Issyk has characteristic Semirechensk Sakas European appearance with an admixture of Mongoloid features. He's age is 16-18 years.

I have proposed a new interpretation etnokona "tigrhauda" from Median "tiger" - "arrow", and hence the Saka-tigrhauda more accurately be called "Sakas in arrow-shaped hats". Their ethnic territory occupied a huge area, extending well beyond the left bank of the Jaxartes (Syr Dariya / Syr Darya), up to the Oxus (Amu Darya / Amu Darya) in the west and in the east including the Altai (Akishev. Kushayev, 1963).

Peculiar art "animal style" extended on the vast steppes of Eurasia in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC. It is characterized by the figure of animals in certain canonical poses and unique methods of artistic performance. One hundred sixty five gold products from Issyk barrow were made in the "animal" style. Majority of Issyk products were made of metal casting techniques, stamping, embossing and engraving, in the form of round sculpture, high relief, bas-relief and planar silhouette images.

Ancient people widely used other materials, skillfully combining metal with wood, skin tissue, different metals together. Wooden handle whips and swept jewelry headdress Issyk warrior trimmed with gold. Iron and gold are combined on a sword, dagger, in the images of sacred trees.

Products impressed with their brightness and vitality of images. The talent and skill of unnamed artist who creates this undying work of art is worth of admiration. Issyk art of animal style - syncretic art, a fusion of two components: distinctive and adopted. However, it, like many of the ancient art of other nations, it is difficult to smuggle a sharp distinction between the components, so they are closely intertwined and merged. Issyk art gives the impression of long fledging, holistic, and in contrast to the Scythian, less eclectic (Akishev, 1984).

Among the works of art from the Issyk barrow there are no objects clearly Persian origin or copied from the ancient Iranian samples, but there are a significant number of pieces made under the strong influence of the art features and the technical and stylistic devices of art of Asia Minor.

Among of them there are those which were borrowed from the arsenal of Iranian art, also zoomorphic images of a lion, griffin, winged beasts and animals, motif of the tree of life – the sacred tree.

Sakas also from Iran borrowed additional attachment style dagger sheath to the leg (thigh) by a second metal plates - the distributor belt. In the case of the Issyk additional attachment of a dagger to the leg proved finding plaques - distributors belt attachment in the original position. One of them was in a hole large plaques adorn the upper part of the sheath, and the other - at the tip of the blade of a dagger. By the way, it should be noted that the ancient Greeks and Scythians was unusual double dagger attachment to the body.

Issyk findings have given new impetus to long-term disputes specialists about the origin of animal style art, his ancestral home. In our opinion, at the moment, after finds extensive collection of Scythian and Saka art objects in the tombs of Tolstoy Gaimanova's grave, mounds of Kakhovskaya and Issyk barrow, there was insufficient evidence to prove the theory of monocentric or polycentric origin animal style.

Items made in the animal style were also known during the paleometal era on the territory of Eurasia. Eurasian tribes (in particular the Andronovo tribes of Siberia and Kazakhstan) have been well known for carving animal images on a bone (and possibly the tree), the technique of melting and casting of copper and bronze, machinery manufacturing gold leaf. Numerous finds of jewelry items (earrings, temple rings, hair clips, belt clips) of bronze and copper, artfully covered with gold leaf. This technique made two large bronze earrings, covered in gold leaf on the inner rim of one of them soldered two cast gold figurines of horses. Earrings date back to 12<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. So, it has been known for its sophisticated technique of time of application of gold leaf to the copper and bronze base. Thus, the technical equipment, the level of knowledge of the technology of the metal and the development of artistic thinking Eurasian tribes were in the high level of progress both intellectually and technically were ready to create highly artistic images in the animal style.

Perhaps that is why the art of animal style in Siberia and Tuva in Central Asia and Kazakhstan, in the Black Sea and the Danube appears suddenly in a developed form. Among the many collections of artistic metal there are little imported products, but items with imported images and scenes are many. Eurasia, probably borrowed from the Near East the main idea of the Incarnation in the art of animal images, art style. At least in ancient Iran products made in the animal style, appeared three or four centuries earlier than in Eurasia.

Based on our opinion, in Eurasia during the Scythian-Sakas time there was several artistic and stylistic schools of art. One of them, as it was mentioned above, locates in Semirechenks School of jewelers.

Works of art, created by the masters of the school, the individual images and stories Issyk treasures brought to perfection and superior in realism and performance technique reference samples ancestral home animal style. Contribution to the art of the animal style in 7<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century BC Eurasian tribes is extremely large. Eurasia is the birthplace of the art of the Scythian-Siberian animal style in 7<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century BC.

The historical fate of the animal style later has been undergoing significant changes. Realistic art form animal style gives way to increasingly stylized and eventually becomes pointless ornamentation. In the first centuries of our era is

replaced by the fanciful polychrome style. Late Sakas stylized animal style formally decline of this art form and historically the next step in the development of the fine arts, its higher level.

The step of completion of animal style art – stage of dying of realism and stylization celebration shows findings of gold jewelry items in the royal burial mounds of a later period. We have in mind the magnificent examples of jewelry after Sakas era when, on the basis of artistic tradition Sakas, appears magnificent, entirely decorative, but subtly masterful polychrome style - the highest stage of jewelry and crafts of antiquity.

Science has various theories and concepts about the time of the homeland and origin of art polychrome style, compile a stage in the history of art of the world nation. A number of researchers on the origin of the original style protect the priority countries of the ancient East.

For example, among the Scythian findings there is golden deer inlaid with colored stone, from Kostroma mound in the Kuban (6<sup>th</sup> century BC), And among the Saka - inlaid deer from Shilikty mound in eastern Kazakhstan (7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) and gold plate, decorated with granulation of Pazyryk mounds in the Altai (5<sup>th</sup> century BC).

Issyk barrow also has products made in a similar technique. Golden earring is a decoration in the form of clusters of beading, animal images on the golden plates that adorned dagger blade, inlaid with colored inserts.

For the history of art the question of priority in the birth of one or another form of art is just a particular theme, having narrowly regional importance. Much more important is the very historical fact of progressive enrichment of culture and art with new works of human genius.

Reconstruction of the social structure of society Saka is theoretical difficult problem. In view of the scarcity of written sources of information on this issue, in determining social stratification Sakas society we refer exclusively to the archaeological material, in particular, to the funeral rite. Involved in such indicators as wealth and poverty burial items, parameters and technical complexity gravestones grave structures, the amount of human labor expended in their construction, the scale of feasts and sacrifices, the existence of writing and stable ideology.

Zhetysu is a unique archaeological area on the scale of clusters of royal burial mounds, reaching a height of 18-20 meters. Such monumental "Saka pyramid" could not be erected over the graves of every member of society. They were the prerogative of a narrow circle of persons. Small number of large mounds compared to the thousands of small mounds, undoubtedly, indicates the division of

society into two groups, a privileged minority and non-privileged majority. It is noteworthy that the beginning of this social inequality was laid in the late Bronze Age at the end of the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC.

The first call to the sociological interpretation of archaeological materials were taken by me in the analysis of the information obtained during the excavations of burial Besshatyr, left by Sakas in 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. 20 mounds were excavated that the parameters of embankments were divided into large, medium and small (Akishev, Kushayev, 1963).

Domination of huge mounds over royal burial mounds represented the nobility. The grandeur of burial mounds - this is also the insignia of power, claiming the former grandeur of the buried kings.

All the king's mound and medium-sized mounds on the eastern Zhetysu by original architectural design were built with a flat top and a straight side slopes, i.e. had the form of a truncated cone.

The level of human labor spent on the transportation of stone and gravel, stone slabs and boulders for the construction of embankments and other complementary facilities of that the kings' monument, is amazing.

According to the excavation, large burial chambers of the three-meter logs of Tien Shan spruce were under each mound of Besshatyr royal kurgan. On the construction of the chamber in the Third Besshatyr mound more than 300 logs were used. Expenditure of human energy required for procurement and transportation.

Experimental estimates of costs of human labor spent on the construction of large, medium and small mounds in the same cemeteries shows that the construction of the largest of the king of the mound has been spent more than ten thousand times more days than the erection of the largest Private mound.

Sharp gradation of parameters of embankments and the amount of labor, required to build them, is proof of development of the social hierarchy in the Sakas society. Complex findings in Issyk barrow gave additional, relevant materials that shed light on the level of the social system Sakas Zhetysu. Summary Besshatyr and Issyk findings generally reproduce the magnificent obsequies persons belonging to the highest rank of Sakas' society. Sakas covered their kings in a golden robe, placed in a monumental burial chambers and ground monument, a huge mound, was constructed over them. Burial rites of other members of society were simplified according to the levels of the hierarchy.

The cult of dead ancestors, especially kings played important role in the rite of differentiation depending on the social position. However, in the rituals of the exaltation of the individual of the dead king had political motives –purely earthly vested interests of his successors. They used the rituals of the burial rite as a

religious and ideological influence on the masses with the aim of justifying the inviolability of the dynasty Saka's of kings.

Undoubtedly, the splendor and richness of gold clothing Issyk Saka were intended not only to the external effect, but had more social content, pursued political and propaganda purposes. The main purpose of clothing was exalting the person of the king, raising it to the rank of sun-like deity.

In the religious beliefs of many Indo-Iranian tribes, the horse was a symbol of the sun, the solar deity. On Issyk headdress horse is depicted with large horns of the goat, which probably symbolized the fusion of images of the solar deity and clan totem. Similar in character finds are known from the mounds of Pazyryk Altai.

A felt mask with antlers, which can be described, was on the horse's head, as well as in the Issyk case, syncretism images.

Issyk horse is depicted with horns and wings. The image of winged creatures is alien to Saka environment, but it is very widespread in Western Asia. In particular, in the Achaemenid Iran personalized supreme god of sky Ahura Mazda, which, goes back to the disembodied deity of Assyria - Ashur, depicted as a winged figure in the solar disk. Probably, Sakas borrowed wings and its solar god depicted in the form of a winged horse with goat horns from Ahura Mazda's image.

Features of the sun god Mithra, the god of the sky Ahura Mazda and tribal totem are merged in the polymorphic figure of Sakas' deity.

Ideological content of the animal style in art was religious justification of Sakas statehood. To be the state religion was the basic idea of the art. The meaning of Issyk findings for the problem is increasing by the discovery of the monument of writing – a silver cup with the inscription. The fact of the existence of writing in any society is reflected in the high level of social and economic organization of the genesis of the earliest forms of the state.

Summarizing all the above information, extracted from archaeological and epigraphic sources (gradation parameters mounds, the presence of large wealth, the number of man, days spent on the construction of the mound, art - as a reflection of a state religion, writing), I am inclined to believe that Sakas of Kazakhstan in terms of the development of social structures were at the stage of addition of early class society, the relations of production in which regulated and regulated by the government.

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## **Reference**

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