

Architectural features of Saka mounds of East Kazakhstan

Architecture monuments of the Early Iron Age in East Kazakhstan, especially in the north-western Altay and Tarbagatay, are not studied well and will give the basic material to reconstruct the history. This article, in addition to materials from the works published, presents absolutely new data and fully demonstrates the concept of the architectural heritage of Saka. Archaeological sites of Shilikty surprised us with design features, architectural construction techniques and skills of art. Tombstone facilities of Saka were varied with a large diversity of styles and shapes. Wide fields of royal tombs were usually constructed in the peak of the period. Discoveries of the last years helped to understand the origin of statehood of the Saka period. The Early Saka archaeological sites of Shilikty (especially the royal ones), in complex with architecture mounds, high culture, architecture, and elegance of jewelry helped to reconstruct the historical and cultural picture of the past of the land. The peak of the foundation of Shilikty mounds was in VIII-VII BC. Shilikty aligned in the valleys, then, later, in VI-V BC was referred to Zhetysu. These confirm the similarity of two regions of the funerary and ritual monuments: jewelry Scythian-Saka animal style is a direct analogue with items from Shilikty barrows.

1. Introduction

Architecture, as a form of expression and visualization of the spiritual and material culture, is an important element of the pan human culture. According to the mediaeval historic and geographic literature and researches of the pre-revolutionary and modern scientists, hundreds of ancient and mediaeval towns and villages and thousands of landmarks were found in Kazakhstan. Unfortunately, when the architects worked and communicated with population, they discovered that the greater part of the population was not properly informed of the historic towns and monuments of architecture. That situation is, apparently, a consequence of the objective factors the population survived. This work is an attempt to analyze the architecture of barrows of the early Saka period, which is now becoming ever more relevant. It can be attributed to rethinking of the monuments studied earlier, and also to receiving and introducing into the scientific turnover of the essentially new data of burial mounds of the early Iron Age of steppe and mountainous-and-valley region of the East Kazakhstan. Poor study of the local historic monuments of architecture was the main reason why the creative development of the national form of architecture of Kazakhstan began a bit later than in other countries of the Central Asia. Before the revolution, there was no any work devoted to the architectural heritage of the Kazakh people. Only after 1930s, when historic and archaeological studying of Kazakhstan became systematic, those monuments were given proper attention to. Material contribution to studying of monuments of the material culture of the past of Kazakhstan, including the architecture monuments, was given by the scientists: A.H. Margulan, T.R. Basenov, M.M. Mendikulov (A.H. Margulan, T.R. Basenov, M.M. Mendikulov, 2010: 256), M.P. Gryaznov (Gryaznov, 1961: 22-25), M.P. Chernopitsky (Chernopitsky, 1984: 70-75) e.t.

2. Shilikty Barrows

The scientific expedition of the Kazakh National University named after Al-Farabi for a period of the past eight years researched Shilikty monuments in the Shilikty valley within the territory of Zaysan Area of the East Kazakhstan region (Samachsev, Toleybaev, Djumabekova, 2004). In 1950-1960s, Shilikty monuments were researched by the well-known archeologist S.S. Chernikov (Chernikov, 1965: 16-57). He dug out 13 barrows in total. Shilikty valley there are known more than 200 monuments of the Early Iron Age, whereof about 120 barrows of Saka-Scythian period are in the center of valley, in the territory to be less than one kilometer width and about six kilometers length. Such dense concentration of the elite monuments of Saka-Scythian culture within the small area was rare not only in Kazakhstan, but also in Eurasia. During eight

archaeological seasons, excavation works helped researching three big, one average, and more than 15 small barrows, the monuments of Shilikty valley and its vicinities were counted and registered (Omarov, 2011: 144-146).

3. Architecture of Baigetobe Barrow

Baigetobe Barrow of group Shilikta III was the complicated and grand architectural structure conditioned by social, cultural, and nature protection purposes. The barrow sizes, obviously, showed the social status of the deceased. Besides, such huge barrow for one person showed the special, chosen social status of that person. Location of the barrow "Baigetobe" in a general plan the barrow group also underlined the special position the person buried therein. The gold vestment of the deceased was a proof of royalty of that person. Reliquary right on the ground, not in a bone chamber, probably had also social and cultic value and associated with the ideological sanction of the early nomadic state. As for the structure, the barrow of Baigetobe consisted of three levels. The first level was made of the wooden tomb constructed at the level of day surface. Walls of the tomb made of the two-row checkered logs; the open space therein was filled with stones. Its East side was of the frustum. The tombs floor area was about 20 sq. m. It was covered with one row timbered flooring fitted tightly. The height of the tomb was 3,7 m (Fig.1.). From the East part, the tomb had dromos covered with logs (Omarov, 2008: 58-68). A round stone barrow was erected above the wooden tomb with a perimeter to be more than 65 m and 4,9 m high. There is obvious thieves' manhole in the middle of the barrow. The third level was made of the ground embankment erected over the stone barrow 7,9 m high. The diameter of the barrow is about 90 m. As well as the majority of other "royal" barrows, that burial was plundered in the ancient time. Thieves made a dug hole in the middle of the barrow for 4 m depth, then, having cut an opening in logs, got inside the tomb. Subsequently, the internal part of the tomb was completely filled with the ground through the hole left by thieves. Despite a partial robbery of the barrow, there were the most valuable findings. A properly processed stone stele 2,8 m long was also found in the tomb. In all probability, it was left there after plunder dug out.

3.1. Burial mound Shilikty II. Barrow №1

Royal Barrow №1 Shilikty II is also big, its diameter is 77 m, and height is more than 6 m. That barrow is interesting with its unique surface construction. The basic part of the barrow was made of turfy and adobe that turned the barrow into the monolithic truncate octal pyramid. The base of the barrow was made of turfy-and-adobe and formed as an octal pyramid with the truncate top that was covered with the gravel ground layer. The earth pyramidal construction of the barrow №1 of group Shilikty II is, perhaps, the only methodically correct dug out and well-documented artifact of the Saka-Scythian culture of Eurasia. The bone chamber was in the middle of the barrow lead by 15-meter dromos made from the east part. A circular fence was made of thin logs under the barrow, around the tomb construction, at the level of the ancient level of the ground. The barrow was fully plundered. There was no deceased in the bone chamber or adjacent structures thereto. Cranial bones of a dog were found in the additional section of the bone chamber of that barrow which points to religious-mythological, world outlook culture of the early Saka.

3.2. Barrow 2 of group Shilikty III

The diameter of the barrow is 44 m., height is 3 m. In the middle of the barrow, there is a bone chamber 0.4 m. depth and 2.1 m. width. The bone chamber made of three vertical layers of logs was surrounded with square construction covered with one layer of the longitudinal logs. Dromos 16,3 m. length, 2.1 m. width, and 1 m. depth was constructed eastward from the bone chamber. By many characteristics, that barrow reminds Baigetobe monument. Earth

embankment, above tomb wood structure, and dromos almost repeat Baigetobe construction, but in small scale.

3.3. Barrow 4

Its diameter is 15 m., height is 1,6 m. A rubblework was found over the bone chamber. The quadrangular shallow bone chamber on the ground surface was contoured with one layer of the thin (d - 20-25 cm) logs. It was covered with one layer of logs fitted tightly. Dromos was constructed eastward from the bone chamber.

4. Conclusion

Adjacent constructions of the above-tomb wooden and turfy-and-clay structures are known from the monuments of the Early Iron Age of Kazakhstan. According to the poor publications and reports of S.S. Chernikov, construction of barrow №7 in necropolis Shilikty I is similar to barrow we researched. Analogous constructions were found in barrows of Ural-Irtysh forest steppe, Scythia-Sarmatian monuments of Don, Cisurals, and Central Pre-Ishim Region. As for the structure of the above ground architecture, Shilikty royal barrows are analogous to the monuments of Zhetysu (Akishev, 1963: 282), than that of Altay. Saka of Shilikty, as well as of Besshatyr in Issyk did not practice the accompanying of the deceased with the horse. That and other aspects associated cultural tradition of Shilikty Saka, on the one hand, and Saka tribes of other regions of Kazakhstan and adjacent regions, on the other hand, need further researches.

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