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THE METAL AGES AND MEDIEVAL PERIOD

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KURGANS OF THE YENISEI KYRGYZ AT THE CHINETA II BURIAL GROUND IN THE ALTAI

This study focuses on the results of excavations of the Kyrgyz burial mounds at Chineta II, northwestern Altai. Local burials in this region are cremations accompanied by weapons, belt sets, and horse harness. They represent two stages of the local variant of the Kyrgyz culture – Yakonur (late 9th – early 10th centuries) and Ak-Tash (late 10th – 11th centuries). The findings demonstrate contact between the Kyrgyz immigrants and the Altai natives. At the Yakonur stage, they appeared to have coexisted peacefully, given that in the 9th–10th centuries Turks were allies of the Kyrgyz in their wars against the Uighurs. At the late stage, the nature of relationships changed, as evidenced by an intrusive Kyrgyz burial in a Srostki kurgan. This may be due to either hostility or to loss of knowledge about the ethnic attribution of the mound. If the latter is true, the Kyrgyz settlement of the Altai in the 11th century was not permanent.

Keywords: *Kyrgyz, Siberia, Central Asia, Middle Ages, ethnopolitical processes, burial rite, cremation, weapon, horse harness.*

Introduction

The Chineta II group of kurgans (burial mounds) is located on the second fluvial terrace of the Inya River, 1.0–1.4 km southeast of Chineta village (Krasnoschekovsky Region of the Altai Territory) (Fig. 1, 2). Since 2001, an archaeological expedition from the Altai State University supervised by the author has been conducting archaeological investigations in the Chineta archaeological microregion that encompasses this chronologically diversified burial ground. As of the date of this article, 29 barrows belonging to the Scythian–Saka and the medieval periods have been excavated. Four of them contained traces of cremation. In addition, a kurgan associated with the Srostki culture contained an intrusive cremation burial. Brief description of the results of the studies has been published (Tishkin, Dashkovskiy, Gorbunov, 2005). This paper presents detailed characteristics of the burial rite, the grave goods found there, as well as cultural and chronological attributes of the examined sites.

Burial rite and grave goods

Kurgans 10–13 were located in the southern part of the Chineta II burial ground, next to the group of Srostki barrows, within a single sacred space (Fig. 2). The mound of kurgan 10, composed of two to four layers of stones, had a diameter of 8.5 m and was 0.06–0.75 m high (Fig. 3). Calcined human bones and associated grave goods were dispersed over a considerably large area on the level of the ancient horizon. This amorphous bone accumulation measured 1.65 m and 1.73 m along the N–S and E–W lines, respectively. Two iron arrowheads, an iron knife fragment, five bronze plaques, and a bronze buckle (Fig. 5, *19*) were found in the northern portion

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Fig. 1. Map showing the location of Chineta II in the Altai Territory.

of the burial. Another bronze buckle (Fig, 5, *18*), small bronze balls created due to the funeral fire, and a horse tooth lay in the eastern part of the burial. In addition, a small round pit-cache, 0.65 m in diameter and 0.33 m deep, containing four iron arrowheads was located in the northern part. According to the classification suggested by V.V. Gorbunov (2006: 32–33), three arrowheads from this barrow can be attributed to type 24 (subtype c) – trihedral with three blades and a washer-like rest, while other three represent type 29 (subtype a) – trihedral asymmetrically rhomboid with a washer-like rest.

Two small, ovoid sword-belt buckles on short, sub rectangular plates differ from each other in the following manner: the plate of one of them has rounded base, while the base of another buckle's plate is triangular. These artifacts are similar to artifacts at collections from the sites of the Kyrgyz culture of the 9th–10th centuries in Khakassia, Tuva, and eastern Kazakhstan: Tyukhtaty cache (Evtyukhova, 1948: Fig. 131); the burial grounds of Tora-Tal-Arty (Nechaeva, 1966: Fig. 9, *4*); Shanchig (Kyzlasov L.R., 1969: Fig. 35, *8*), Zevakinsky (Arslanova, 1972: Pl. IV, *19*); and others.

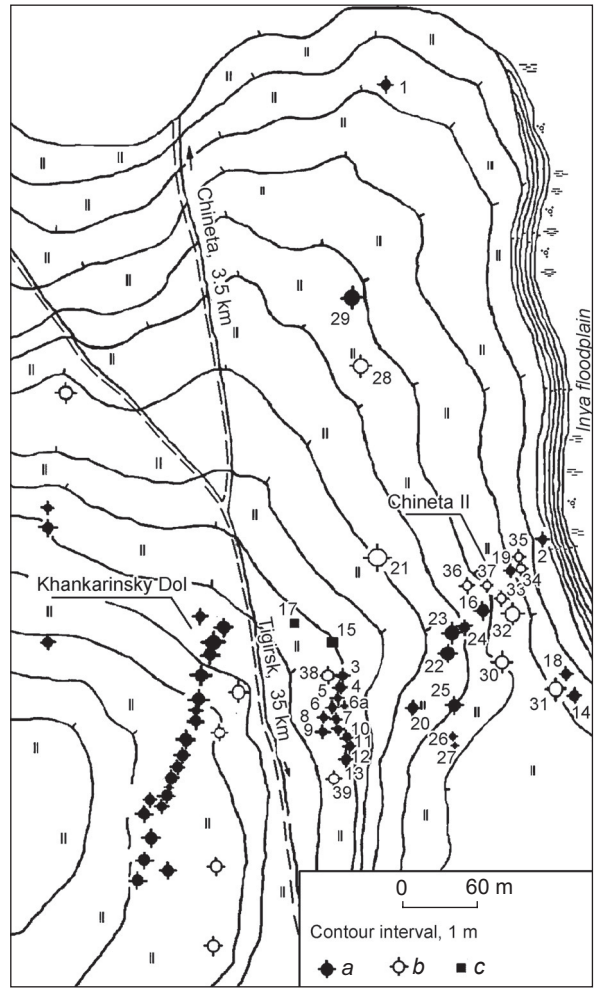

Fig. 2. Plan of the Chineta II and Khankarinsky Dol burial grounds.
a – excavated kurgans; *b* – unexcavated kurgans; *c* – excavated Turkic enclosures.

Fig. 3. Mound of kurgan 10.

Fig. 4. Cremation burial in kurgan 10.

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